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Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 8

www.saipantribune.com | THURSDAY JANUARY 11, 2024 | www.facebook.com/saipantribune

Of 300 concrete poles that arrived in August, 200 already installed. PAGE 2

Palacios leaves for DC meetings. PAGE 3

Man previously arrested in scheme to illegally enter Guam attempts it again

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A man who was arrested last year for his alleged involvement in a scheme to enter Guam illegally via boat was recently caught again trying to enter Guam illegally by boat when he and several others had to be rescued by the U.S Coast Guard last Jan. 6.

Weng Bin, one of 14 Chinese nationals who were arrested last year for attempting to illegally enter Guam by boat, was allegedly caught trying to enter Guam again by boat last Jan. 6 when the U.S Coast Guard rescued him and several others as their boat was taking in water.

Because of this, the U.S.

See MAN on Page 4

CNMI ends FY 2023 with $4.1M deficit

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

» Palacios says deficit due to $313,310 in revenue shortfall, $3.8M in over-expenditure

The CNMI ended fiscal year 2023 with an estimated $4.1-million deficit, arising from a revenue shortfall of $313,310 and over-expenditure amounting to $3.8 million, according to Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.

Citing the Department of Finance's fourth quarter report for fiscal year 2023, Palacios said the total actual revenue collections amounted to just $163.8 million, which means a shortfall of $313,310, or 0.19% of the total forecasted revenues of $164.1 million.

Following debt service payments and earmarked funds,

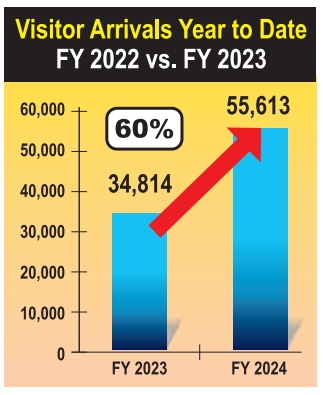
See DEFICIT on Page 4

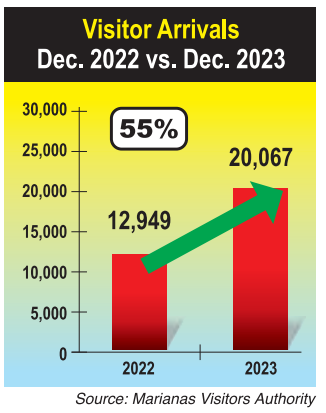
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The CNMI Department of Finance Building on Capital Hill.

Visitor arrivals up 55% last December

» Arrivals still 62% lower than pre-COVID levels





Source: Marianas Visitors Authority

According to the Marianas Visitors Authority, arrivals to the CNMI grew 55% to 20,067 visitors in December 2023, compared to 12,949 visitors received in December 2022.

Calendar year 2023 (January through December) reached 215,543 visitors, the first breach of the 200,000-mark since the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiscal year-to-date arrivals (October through December) are 60% higher

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Santos provides OPA info to assist probe on six issues raised by MPLT against DPL

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Public Lands Secretary Teresita A. Santos has provided the Office of the Public Auditor with information that, according to her, will assist OPA and Office of the Attorney General in their investigation on each of the six issues the Marianas Public Land Trust board of trustees had complained against DPL.

In her letter Tuesday to acting Public Auditor Dora Inos-Deleon Guerrero, Santos provided OPA with information that she believes renders moot the MPLT trustees' complaints against DPL.

The MPLT complaint identi-

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INSIDE

NATION

Federal appeals court judges in Washington expressed deep skepticism Tuesday that Donald Trump was immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

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WORLD

Taiwan's Defense Ministry mistranslated an alert into English on Tuesday, saying China had launched a missile instead of a satellite and urging caution days before the island's elections.

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ENVIRONMENT

Earth last year shattered global annual heat records, flirted with the world's agreed-upon warming threshold and showed more signs of a feverish planet.

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SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

Local

Of 300 concrete poles that arrived in August, 200 already installed

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Of the 300 concrete power poles that arrived on Saipan last August, 200 have already been installed to replace the wooden poles on Saipan, according to Commonwealth Utilities Corp. Power Division manager Lee Lieto.

» **Over 4,000 concrete power poles already installed to replace wooden ones on Saipan**

Lieto disclosed last Thursday that Saipan has 12,000 wooden poles, and over 4,000 concrete poles have already been installed to replace the wooden ones so far.

The priority is to replace the wooden power poles along the main roads, he added.

Lieto, along with acting CUC executive director Betty G. Terlaje and CUC Energy Renewable Department engineer Adrian Reyes, testified last Thursday before the House of Representatives Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation and Communications on the subject of House Bill 23-92, which seeks to suspend the CNMI's net energy metering law.

In the same interview with Lieto, Terlaje said that work to replace the wooden poles is the reason why they schedule power outages in certain areas on the island.

"We're trying not to affect any schools, daycare, or large water wells. So we're trying to spread [the installations] out and do it slowly," Terlaje said.

She said they have been doing the replacement of wooden poles for three months now.

Before, CUC would do the installation one at a time so Terlaje said she asked the CUC staff to schedule the replacements for one whole month so that CUC customers, particularly the commercial ones, can plan ahead.

Terlaje said many wooden

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Palacios leaves for DC meetings

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios left the CNMI on Tuesday for a meeting this week with senior leaders of federal agencies and military branches in Washington, D.C.

According to the Office of the Governor, these high-level talks with senior leaders of federal agencies and military will focus on key needs of the CNMI, including leveraging federal assistance for infrastructure projects and further diversifying the Commonwealth's economic base.

In his visit to the nation's capital, Palacios will meet with leaders from the U.S. Department of Defense, including senior representatives from different military branches. The discussions will include the urgent need for critical infrastructure improvements on all three islands and other projects and activities as part of broader efforts to advance the DOD's regional initiatives.

Palacios will also be meeting with U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, assistant secretary for Insular and International Affairs Carmen Cantor, and deputy assistant secretary Keone Nakoa to continue discussions initiated last year relating to technical assistance, grant programs, and other funding opportunities.

Palacios will also discuss critical improvements needed for the CNMI's air and seaports with representatives of the U.S. Department of Transportation, including senior leaders from the Maritime Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Commonwealth Ports Authority board chair Jose Ayuyu will accompany Palacios on these meetings.

The Office of the Governor noted that Palacios' travel is funded through federally-sourced grants. It is the first off-island trip of the governor this year.

DOL, WIA, NMTECH launch construction pre-apprenticeship

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The CNMI Department of Labor and the CNMI Workforce Investment Agency, in partnership with the Northern Marianas Technical Institute, will be launching a construction pre-apprenticeship program next week in an effort to boost the construction industry in the CNMI.

The program, which is made possible through a $10.6-million award from the U.S Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, will provide participants with construction industry recognized certifications, stipends, and ultimately a pathway to an official industry apprenticeship.

Classes are set to begin next Tuesday, Jan. 16, so all interested participants are encouraged to register as soon as possible. Registration has been extended to Jan. 16.

For more information on

See DOL on Page 4

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2018 KIA FORTE — SALE PRICE $12,995 — $103 PER PAYCHECK — STK:19HS1006A
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2022 HYUNDAI ELANTRA N — SALE PRICE $27,995 — $188 PER PAYCHECK — STK:23RNS22
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2020 MAZDA MAZDA3 — SALE PRICE $16,995 — $133 PER PAYCHECK — STK:23HS041
2017 TOYOTA SIENNA — SALE PRICE $28,995 — $206 PER PAYCHECK — STK: 17P499
2018 KIA FORTE — SALE PRICE $12,995 — $103 PER PAYCHECK — STK:23RUS17
2018 NISSAN ROGUE — SALE PRICE $18,995 — $144 PER PAYCHECK — STK:18P393
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SANTOS

From page 1

fies six issues that they believe show a violation of DPL's constitutional and statutory responsibilities. The MPLT trustees, through counsel Robert T. Torres, asked the OAG and OPA to investigate DPL for its alleged continuing withholding of net land lease funds and failure to remit the funds to MPLT.

For one, MPLT takes issue with DPL's determination that no remittances to MPLT are due for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

Santos said, however, in her letter to Inos-Deleon Guerrero Tuesday that MPLT improperly assumes that there should be a remittance due every fiscal year.

Santos pointed out that, in DPL lawsuit against the CNMI, the NMI Supreme Court determined that, although Article 11 Section 5 is no longer constitutionally operative following the dissolution of the Marianas Public Land Corp., MPLT exists in perpetuity and is intended to continue to receive lease proceeds from public lands.

Santos said DPL has therefore continued to remit funds as required by Article 11, Section 5 (g), and has continued to retain only "the amount necessary to meet reasonable expenses of administration and management, land surveying, homestead development, and any other expenses reasonably necessary for the accomplishment of its functions."

Santos said in those years in which the revenue to DPL is lower than average or its expenses are higher than average, the amounts spent by DPL as reasonably necessary expenses may be higher than its collected revenue.

For instance, she said, DPL did not receive the total amount of its forecasted revenues in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She said DPL's revenues include additional rent paid by lessees and is tied to the Business Gross Revenue received by the lessees, so significant reductions in a lessee's BGR results in reductions in DPL's revenue.

In addition, she said, numerous lessees simply failed to make payments of base rent, despite DPL's collection efforts.

DPL also had increased expenses in 2021 and 2022, she said, to maintain public lands that were not under lease, such as Mañagaha Island and the Mariana Resort & Spa property.

Santos said that, based on DPL's unaudited financial reports, no remittances were due to MPLT in 2021 and 2022 because DPL's revenue did not exceed its reasonably necessary expenses in those fiscal years.

She noted that DPL's practice has been to remit funds to MPLT once an excess is verified by an audit of its financial statements.

Santos said the audit for 2021 is expected to be completed within the next few weeks, and DPL has issued a request for proposals for the 2022 audit.

To accommodate MPLT's requests for earlier remittances, Santos said DPL made an estimate remittance for 2023 based on its unaudited financial statements, in the amount of $500,000.

As for MPLT's complaint that DPL failed to remit $1 million from settlement funds in the lawsuit involving Mariana Resort & Spa property, Santos said MPLT is correct that DPL must remit supplemental or excess funds to MPLT, but its determination that the funds are supplemental or excess is "premature."

At this time, she said, DPL has not made any expenditures from the $1 million in revenue now recorded for fiscal year 2024. To remain in compliance with the statutory mandate, DPL has now submitted a supplemental budget for its proposed additional expenditures, she said.

The intended expenditures include purchase of a vessel and vehicle, professional services, and maintenance costs for the DPL Compliance Division; the purchase of a vehicle for the Office of the Secretary; funding for land use plan development; and funding for surveying work on Rota and Tinian to promote homestead development.

Santos said the supplemental budget also itemizes the estimated $300,000 that will be transferred to MPLT at the end of the fiscal year. She said any remittance of these funds to MPLT, minus DPL's reasonably necessary expenses for its administration, must be determined after the end of fiscal year 2024.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

DEFICIT

From page 1

the remaining resources appropriated for fiscal year 2023 through Public Law 23-04 is $116.2 million, said the governor in his Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Friday that the Legislature received on Monday.

He noted that despite austerity and cost-reduction efforts, the general fund shouldered a total of $120 million in expenditures.

As a result, Palacios said, total spending and obligations in fiscal year 2023 exceed the appropriated budgetary resources by 3% or $3.8 million, mainly because of contributions to the government's insurance program, the Group Health & Life Insurance Program.

He added that the expenditure report reflects the payment of the full outstanding obligation to the Public School System and the Board of Education.

Palacios said the end of fiscal year 2023 reflects his administration's commitment to restore fiscal health while protecting critical priorities. At the beginning of 2023, he said, they were faced with severe fiscal challenges and implemented painful but necessary cost-cutting measures, including downsizing government, terminating non-essential contracts, and reducing work hours.

With the Legislature's partnership and the passage of Public Law 23-04, Palacios said they were able to stabilize government operations, protect public health and safety, and sustain payments to 25% of retiree pensions.

Public Law 23-04 revised the budget law for the CNMI government's operations for the remaining months of fiscal year 2023 and provided an updated spending plan.

As for tax collections in fiscal year 2023, Palacios said 76% came from income taxes. He said the primary source of income taxes is derived from the Business Gross Revenue Taxes that represents 44% or $70.4 million in actual collections, exceeding budgetary projections of all total revenue collections for fiscal year 2023, based on businesses and commercial activities by $7.7 million.

The Top 3 contributing business sectors are retail, construction, and financial institutions, making up 46% of all BGRT collections across all business sectors, the report states.

Income tax collections from wage and salary tax amounted to $27.3 million, corporate Northern Marianas Territorial Income Tax was at $4.8 million, and individual income tax was at $3.4 million.

BGRT, corporate, and personal NMTIT exceeded budgetary projections by $7.7 million, $2.3 million, and $1.7 million, respectively.

On the other hand, excise tax collection fell short of fiscal projections by $17.3 million, with total receipts amounting to $22.7 million or 14% of all revenue collection resources, Palacios said.

On other taxes and fees, the governor said the Division of Customs & Biosecurity collected $26.2 million in revenue from import taxes and fees, such as excise tax, container tax, beautification tax, and penalties and fees at the ports.

In terms of tourist arrivals, comparing arrivals in fiscal years 2023 and 2022, Palacios said the CNMI economy is continuing to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry.

The CNMI's primary tourism markets are from Korea, Guam, and the United States.

Palacios said the CNMI's tourism industry successfully used the travel bubble agreement with the South Korean government in the first and second quarters of fiscal year 2023, allowing for the implementation of the Marianas Visitors Authority's Tourism Resumptive Incentive Program before the program's closure in February 2023.

Even with the program's closure, though, the CNMI continues to see a significant increase in total tourist arrivals, with 194,744 arrivals in fiscal year 2023 compared to 69,534 in fiscal year 2022, or an increase of 180% in tourist arrivals, Palacios added.

VISITOR

From page 1

than last fiscal year. However, monthly arrivals are 62% lower than pre-pandemic levels of December 2019, when arrivals reached 52,297 visitors.

Visitor arrivals from Korea registered 16,369 visitors in December, 66% higher than December 2022. Jeju Air and T'way operate a total of 21 regular flights each week to Saipan throughout the month, and Asiana Airlines resumed service on Dec. 20 with two weekly flights using A330 aircraft with 290 seats during the winter season.

The strong U.S. dollar and weaker Korean won and Japanese yen continue to influence travelers from those countries to choose non-U.S. destinations at this time.

The Marianas received 888 visitors from Japan in December 2023 compared to 734 visitors in December 2022. Overall, the number of outbound Japanese travelers making international travel was 38% lower year-on-year as of November, that latest available data; Hawaii was 49% lower and Guam was 71% lower in the month. Additionally, higher fuel surcharges are driving up flight costs, and with limited flights to the Marianas, Japanese travelers are also having to pay for three nights while staying only two days. To directly counter the unfavorable currency exchange rate, the MVA is continuing its "Marianacation Tabitoku"—or Travel Deal—promotion that aims to entice visitors with special offers from United Airlines, local hotels, and MVA member businesses, including the chance to win $1,000 and other prizes in a raffle.

China arrivals in December 2023 reached 514 compared to 36 arrivals in December 2022. Prior to the pandemic, China was the second largest source market of visitors to the Marianas with numerous direct flights a week. Most visitors from China are now FITs transiting via Seoul and Tokyo to the Marianas.

In December, the Marianas also received 1,188 visitors from Guam, 769 visitors from the United States, and a combined 339 visitors from all other markets. ***(MVA)***

MAN

From page 1

Probation Office has filed a petition with the U.S. District Court for the NMI seeking to revoke Weng's supervised release.

"This Probation Office respectfully requests that the court issue an arrest warrant for Weng and upon its execution, that he appear at a hearing scheduled by the court, and during that hearing, he be held to answer or show cause why supervised release in this case should not be revoke," states the Probation Office's petition.

Specifically, Weng violated the terms of his release when he left the judicial district without first getting permission from the court or the probation officer, failed to submit a monthly supervision report for December 2023, and failed to follow the instructions of the probation officer related to the conditions of supervision.

According to court documents, Weng was sentenced last Nov. 8, 2023, by Senior Judge Alex R. Munson on charges of conspiracy to transport illegal aliens. He was sentenced to an imprisonment term of time served, approximately 10 days, followed by one year of supervised release with conditions.

Weng's term of supervised release started on the same date and is set to expire on Nov. 7, 2024.

On Nov. 13, 2023, Weng was instructed that he cannot leave Saipan without permission from the court or Probation office. He was instructed to report every first week of the month to submit a monthly supervision report. However, Weng failed to submit an MSR for the month of December 2023, which was due between Jan. 1 and 5, 2024.

On Jan. 6, Probation Officer Gregory F. Arriola received information from Homeland Security Investigation that Weng had been caught attempting to enter Guam via boat. It was noted that Weng's boat had to be rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard after taking on water.

Weng was instructed to report to the U.S. Probation Office in Guam on Jan. 8, during which Arriola was able to visually verify that Weng is the same individual being supervised by the Saipan USPO.

Weng was part of a group of six Chinese nationals who were aboard a distressed boat who were rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam some 30 miles northwest of Guam, on Jan. 6, 2023.

POLES

From page 2

power poles on Tinian have already been replaced with concrete ones, while there are only a few concrete poles on Rota.

She said their next project to install concrete poles will focus on Rota.

Funding for the concrete poles come from the Federal Emergency Management Office.

CUC started the installation of concrete poles as part of its restoration efforts after Super Typhoon Yutu's devastation in 2018 on Saipan and Tinian. CUC contracted a private company for the installation work and keeps applying for grants in order to obtain more concrete poles.

DOL

From page 3

how to register for the program, visit the CNMI DOL's Facebook page.

Although open to the public, applicants are still subject to eligibility requirements.

DOL and WIA have also partnered with Island Training Solutions to launch a pre-apprenticeship program in the hospitality industry.

Classes for this program will begin on Feb. 6, so interested participants are encouraged to register as soon as possible.

Visit CNMI DOL's Facebook page for more information on the Hospitality pre-apprenticeship program.

Community invited to NMC's Health Night on Jan. 18

The CNMI Small Business Development Center Network at the Northern Marianas College, in collaboration with the NMC Health Squad, is thrilled to announce the 2nd Annual Health Night, scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024, from 4:30pm to 7pm at NMC's Mango Terrace between Buildings N and O.

This unique community event is designed to promote health and wellness while showcasing the vibrant offerings of local businesses and organizations. Attendees can look forward to an array of activities, demonstrations, and opportunities to engage with health-conscious vendors.

Event Highlights:

■ Mini Farmers Market: Discover fresh, locally-sourced produce and support our community farmers.

■ Taichi Class: Join an invigorating taichi class led by experienced NMC instructor Barry Wicksman, promoting physical and mental well-being.

■ NMC Nursing Club Health Screening: Take advantage of free health screenings provided by the NMC Nursing Club, ensuring your well-being.

■ Healthy Recipe Demonstration: NMC's Cooperative Research, Extension, and Education Services will conduct a live demonstration of delicious and nutritious recipes, inspiring healthier eating habits.

■ Client Vendors from CNMI SBDC: Explore a variety of health-forward products from local small businesses supported by the CNMI SBDC. The following vendors are:

- ❖ Mind2Muscle
- ❖ Latte Built Fitness — 24-Hour Gym
- ❖ Camakane Catering
- ❖ Tyler's Gelatte Stone
- ❖ Paradise Dental Spa

■ Info Booth from CHCC's Community Guidance Center: Learn about behavioral health services offered by the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.'s Community Guidance Center.

Nadine Deleon Guerrero, network director of CNMI SBDC, said, "We are excited to bring the community together for our 2nd Annual Health Night. This event is a testament to the importance of fostering a healthy lifestyle while supporting local businesses."

About CNMI SBDC Network:

The CNMI SBDC Network provides business consulting, training, and resources to small businesses in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, fostering economic growth and sustainability.

About NMC Health Squad:

The NMC Health Squad is dedicated to promoting health awareness and wellness within the Northern Marianas College community and beyond.

The CNMI SBDC Network promotes a business-friendly economic infrastructure in the community, builds entrepreneurial capacity and financial literacy within that community, and provides current and nascent small businesses with the technical assistance, counseling, training, and support they need to innovate, adapt, and grow.

The CNMI SBDC Network comprises the CNMI SBDC lead center located on Saipan, the Rota SBDC, and Tinian SBDC. CNMI SBDC Network is partially funded by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Northern Marianas College. ***(PR)***

Coast Guard responds to grounded vessel off Maui District 14

HONOLULU, Hawaii—The U.S. Coast Guard and local agencies are responding to a foreign flagged sailing vessel that ran aground near Lahaina, Maui on Monday.

Good Samaritans rescued eight people from the sailing vessel *Altego II* after it ran aground near Lahaina Harbor.

At 12:20pm, Coast Guard Sector Honolulu watch standers received a radio distress call from the *Altego II*, a 52-foot sailing vessel with eight people on board, after they ran aground near the entrance to Lahaina Harbor.

Coast Guard Sector Honolulu issued an urgent marine broadcast to mariners, dispatched a 45-foot Response Boat-Medium crew from Station Maui, and diverted the Coast Guard cutter *William Hart* to respond to the situation.

"Due to the potential pollution threat this vessel represents to the sensitive marine environment and surrounding area, and with a heightened concern for the strong Kona winds predicted through Wednesday, the Coast Guard is proactively engaged with the vessel owner to ensure salvage and pollution removal efforts are made as quickly and safely as possible," said Cmdr. Kristen Hahn, Sector Honolulu Response department head.

Good Samaritan vessels operating in the area were able to safely transport eight people, including five children, to Lahaina, Maui. No injuries were reported.

The Coast Guard and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources are ensuring the responsible party is taking the appropriate actions to salvage and minimize any potential impacts to the environmentally sensitive area around Lahaina, Maui. No wildlife impacts have been reported or observed at this time. ***(USCG)***

Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
1 Lower Navy Hill Road Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950

"ADDENDUM"

Extension of Offeror Question from 1/15/2024 - 02/08/2024
Extension of Submission Date from 1/15/2024 to 02/15/2024

RFP24-CHCC/HIT-EMR/EHR-002A1
"COMMONWEALTH HEALTH CENTER CERTIFIED ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT"

Notice to Offerors

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for the "Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation Certified Electronic Health Record Implementation Project" (RFP24-CHCC/HIT-EMR/EHR-002) is available on this website; **https: //www.chcc.health/RFP / requestforproposal.php.**

Issuer Information
This RFP is issued by the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) of the Northern Marianas Islands, 1178 Hinemlu' St. Garapan, Saipan MP 96950.

Notice of Intent to Submit a Proposal
Interested offerors must email a "Notice of Intent to Submit a Proposal" to Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) Procurement Director, Cora Ada, at cora.ada@chcc.health as soon as practicable. This notice ensures that all interested parties receive relevant information on RFP updates or questions. While this step is crucial, it does not bind the offeror to make a submission. If an interested offeror fails to submit a notice of intent, they acknowledge and accept the risk of potentially missing crucial information.

All notices of intent to submit a proposal must include the RFP number (RFP24-CHCC/HIT EMR/EHR-002) and project title, "Community Health Center Certified Electronic Health Record Implementation Project", in the subject line. The content of the email should state the Offeror organization name, at least one primary email contact, and a brief statement of intent to submit a proposal.

Communication Protocol
Questions about this RFP will only be received in writing via email to CHCC Director of IT, Bel Busby at bel.busbv@chcc.health and CHCC Procurement Director, Cora Ada at cora.ada@chcc.health with the RFP number and project title as the subject. Questions communicated verbally may not be answered. Offerors must avoid direct communication about this RFP with other CHCC staff members.

RFP Timeline
- Deadline for Offeror questions is 3:00 P.M. (Chamorro Standard Time), February 8, 2024
- Final proposals must be submitted as docx or pdf attachments via email to cora.ada@chcc.health. and must be received by 4:30 P.M. (Chamorro Standard Time), February 15. 2024
- Late proposals won't be accepted.

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

SHERRYL G. DELA CRUZ, Petitioner, vs. RANEL H. DELA CRUZ, Respondent,

FCD-DI CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0495

SUMMONS FOR PUBLICATION

TO THE ABOVE NAME RESPONDENT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Petitioner whose address is P.O. Box 7777 SVRB, Saipan, MP 96950, as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at P.O. Box 500307 Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this summons, judgement by default may be taken against you for relief in the complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Li Fen Lu Delos Reyes (Name of Mother/Father), A.P.L.DLR. (Name(s) of Child(ren)) Plaintiffs, vs. Patrick Pinaula Delos Reyes (Name of the Mother/Father) Defendant

FCD PA CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0491

SUMMONS FOR PUBLICATION

TO THE ABOVE-NAMED DEFENDANT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the Court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Plaintiff whose address is P.O. Box 7350 SVRB, Saipan MP 96950 as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this Summons, Judgement by Default may be taken against you for relief in the Complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December, 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

2024 Annual General Membership Meeting

All Commonwealth Cancer Association (CCA) clients, caregivers, partners, donors, volunteers, and other friends are invited to the CCA's Annual General Membership Meeting, to be held at **5:30 p.m. on January 18th, 2024 in the CCA Conference Room, Marina Heights I, Suite 104, Puerto Rico, Saipan.**

The CCA would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to all of its supporters in 2023. Your donations—monetary, in-kind, time, and efforts—have been invaluable to the CCA as it strives to support survivors and promote awareness of cancer-related issues in the CNMI.

As a community-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working toward a cancer-free CNMI, the CCA conducts public outreach about cancer risk reduction and early detection and provides direct support to cancer survivors and their caregivers.

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514
Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp • Website: http://www.nmhcgov.net
Tels: (670) 234-9447 / 234-6866 / 234-7670 • Fax: (670) 234-9021

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

NMHC hereby publicly discloses that on Monday, January 31, 2022, Yvette R. and Ray D. Sablan, an immediate family member of Leilani A. Manibusan, an employee of NMHC, applied for assistance under the Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG–DR) Affordable Rental Housing Development Program.

Said applicant is aware of the housing needs of Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) families who have been affected by Typhoon Mangkhut and Super Typhoon Yutu. The CNMI has not been able to recover from this disaster quickly enough to meet the community's housing needs. The "Westview Apartment" project proposes to build two (2) units, consisting of three-bedrooms each. The proposed project will contribute to addressing some of the market demands for affordable housing and the current housing shortages our island is experiencing. Leilani A. Manibusan is not and shall not be involved in the handling of this loan application.

NMHC discloses this possible conflict pursuant to 24 CFR § 92.356 in order to allow any interested persons to comment before the application is considered for an exception under the applicable conflict regulations.

Any comments should be submitted to NMHC on or before Friday, January 12, 2024.

Dated this 28th day of December, 2023.

/s/
Jesse S. Palacios
Corporate Director

Scheduled power service interruptions for January 2024

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that there will be scheduled power service interruptions for the month of January 2024, as CUC continues its ongoing system maintenance. See additional information below:

Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio (Alu Dr. and Bula Ln.)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace four 45-feet concrete poles with 40-foot concrete poles.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-3:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: CUC Lab and Water Division, Puerto Rico, and Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Water Wells Affected: PR-164
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None

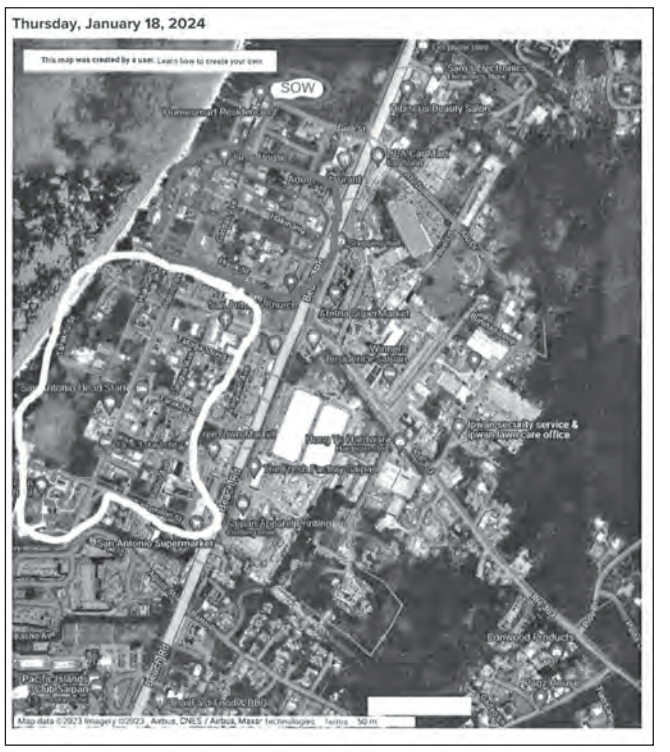
Momentary Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-9am and 3pm to 3:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Lower Base (CUC Power Plant-1 and DFW), CUC Lab and Water Division, Puerto Rico, Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant, and Lower Navy Hill
- Water Wells Affected: PR-164
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: S-1, S-3, and Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: Puerto Rico and Lower Navy HIll

Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace four 45-foot wooden power poles with concrete poles.

Friday, Jan. 12, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio (Guili St.)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace two 45-foot concrete poles with 40-foot concrete poles and replace a 45-foot wooden power pole with a 40-foot concrete pole.

CUC

Map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled power service interruption on Jan. 11, 2024.



CUC

Map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled power service interruption on Jan. 18, 2024.

Tuesday, January 23, 2024
Garapan (Fiesta barracks & former Nam Dae Moon Restaurant)
Flores Rosa St
Tokyo Mart
Indonesian Store

CUC

Map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled power service interruption on Jan. 23, 2024.

CUC

Map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled power service interruption on Jan. 25, 2024.

Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-3:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: CUC Lab and Water Division, Puerto Rico, and Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Water Wells Affected: PR-164
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None

Momentary Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-9am and 3pm-3:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Lower Base (CUC Power Plant-1 and DFW), CUC Lab and Water Division, Puerto Rico, Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant, and Lower Navy Hill
- Water Well(s) Affected: PR-164
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: S-1, S-3, and Sadog Tasi Treatment Plant
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: Puerto Rico and Lower Navy Hill
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace four 45-foot wooden power poles with concrete poles.

Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Afetnas (Palos Ln.)
- Water Well(s) Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Lights Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace three 45-foot concrete poles with 40-foot concrete poles.

Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio
- Water Well(s) Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None

Momentary Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-9am and 2pm-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio (Francisco M. Sablan Middle School and San Antonio Headstart)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace three 45-foot concrete poles with 40-foot concrete poles and replace two 45-foot wooden power poles with 40-foot concrete poles.

Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-12:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Chalan Laulau (IT&E building) and Garapan (Fiesta barracks and former Nam Dae Moon Restaurant)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace two 40-foot wooden power poles with concrete poles and reinstall transformers, respectively.

Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am to 2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Gualo Rai (BECQ building)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace a 40-foot wooden primary pole with a 40-foot concrete pole and reinstall a transformer.

Thursday, Jan 25, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Northern Marianas College, Joeten Housing, and Fina Sisu
- Water Well(s) Affected: NMC Water Tank/Reservoir, As Terlaje Booster Station and Chlorine Station
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: W-8
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace a 45-foot wooden power pole with a 40-foot concrete pole and reinstall a transformer.

Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-12:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Chalan Kanoa (MS Villagomez building) and Garapan (Majesty Restaurant)
- Water Wells) Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to replace two 40-foot wooden power poles with concrete poles and reinstall transformers, respectively.

Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024
Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Garapan (Saipan OneTel building, QQ Car Rental, High Roller Poker, and Sang Jee Car Rental)
- Water Well(s) Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC linemen to relocate and replace two 40-foot wooden power poles with 40-foot concrete poles, a 45-foot wooden power pole with a 40-foot concrete pole, and to reinstall transformers.

CUC continues to work diligently to minimize any inconvenience to its customers. For more information, contact its hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website, and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates. For emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(CUC)***

MSC *Bellissima* Port Call

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios welcomes MSC *Bellissima*'s crew to Saipan during a welcoming ceremony aboard the vessel last Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Thousands of Japanese visitors take a day trip to Managaha during MSC *Bellissima*'s port call on Saipan last Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Saipan saw an influx of visitors last Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024 after the MSC *Bellissima*, a 7,000-person capacity cruise ship, made a port call at the Port of Saipan.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Hundreds of Japanese visitors are loaded into buses after getting off the MSC *Bellissima* for a tour of Saipan during the cruise ship's port call on Saipan.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Visitors aboard the MSC *Bellissima* are greeted with cultural dances performed by local indigenous groups upon getting off the cruise ship.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Local vendors line up at the port of Saipan during MSC *Bellissima*'s day-long stop over at the Saipan port last Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Tour busses, taxis, and vans owned by dive companies line up at the Port of Saipan in time to welcome incoming visitors aboard the MSC *Bellissima*.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Japanese visitors purchase cultural keepsakes from local vendors lined up at the port of Saipan during MSC *Bellissima*'s stop over.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

The MSC *Bellissima*, a Japan-based cruise ship, made a day-long port call at the Port of Saipan boosting tourism in the CNMI by a couple thousand of people.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Guests of the MSC *Bellissima* take off on foot to explore Saipan during the ship's port call on Saipan last Jan. 4.

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 8

Published daily at 2/F JP Center,
Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
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EDITORIAL

As Americans struggle, record raises for federal workers

Bidenomics has made life miserable for many American families struggling with higher prices for food and other staples. But while private-sector stiffs face challenges navigating the wreckage of the president's policies, federal government employees will have it a bit easier in 2024.

Last month, the Office of Personnel Management published updated pay scales for federal employees. The adjustments reflect an August executive order signed by President Joe Biden promising generous pay hikes to federal workers in 2024. The 5.2 percent average raise will be the largest annual increase since 1980 under President Jimmy Carter.

Is it a coincidence that both Carter and Biden—unpopular leaders presiding over economies wrought by inflation and sluggish housing markets caused by high mortgage interest rates—sought to placate a key Democratic constituency during a presidential election year? Hardly.

For comparison, a survey conducted late last year by the Society of Human Resources Managers estimates that the average private-sector employee can expect a pay hike of 3.5 percent this year. Many will likely get nothing. Let's remember that these are the workers who must generate the billions in tax revenue necessary to cover Biden's benevolence.

This is not to say that those toiling for the federal government—who already enjoy comfortable pension benefits and ironclad job security that their counterparts in the private sector can only dream of—don't deserve an occasional raise. They do. But the timing of these pay hikes further exposes the tone-deaf nature of this White House.

The national debt just roared past $34 trillion. Prices for goods and services remain elevated thanks to the administration's lavish spending habits. More families have been forced to take on credit card debt as interest rates soar thanks to Biden's policies.

The Heritage Foundation estimated last year that the average American household has lost the equivalent of $7,400 in annual income since Biden was sworn into office. "That is more than a month's salary for many families and the equivalent of more than a 10 percent pay cut for the median household income," EJ Antoni of the think tank told Fox Business, citing higher borrowing costs and lower real wages.

Yet Biden remains unapologetically committed to an economic agenda of lavish spending, borrowing and $1.7 trillion annual deficits. That he would now approve record raises for a favored special interest group is a microcosm of the bigger picture. It's also just another indication that the president doesn't have much concern for those who must pay the bills.

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Is the message of 'Barbie' all it's cracked up to be?

By KAREN STABINER
Los Angeles Times

Karen Stabiner is a journalist, novelist and the author of six nonfiction books.

I'm not a Barbie fan. She made me and my friends feel bad about ourselves for being built like real girls, back in the day. I only reluctantly watched the movie, once it was free on a streaming service, so I could participate in the national debate.

And then I got seduced, a little bit, by the movie's sly, subversive charm. Recently, younger women have explained to me that feminism is irrelevant to their lives, so I am grateful when a $145 million movie makes its case. That's some megaphone.

By the time Rhea Perlman showed up as the ghost of Barbie's creator, Ruth Handler, I was on board as much as someone who never wears pink could be.

Who wouldn't want Perlman/Handler as their Jewish grandma Obi-Wan, encouraging and kind, determined and sweet, a hero to women everywhere. She was exactly the guiding light a doll needed to cross the Barbie Land/Los Angeles barrier, from the land of perfection to the land of cellulite and mortality. Or she was until she said, "We mothers stand still, so our daughters can look back to see how far they've come."

Hang on a minute. We do what, and why? Let's fact-check that one.

Handler was born in 1916; her generation had little choice but to stand still in many ways because they were supposed to be full-time homemakers. Handler ignored gender destiny, however. She started working at 18, created Barbie and then, after a breast cancer diagnosis, developed a better-fitting prosthetic whose customers included first lady Betty Ford. World War II opened a temporary, Rosie the Riveter window of job opportunity for some of her contemporaries, but once soldiers returned from the front it was a woman's patriotic duty to surrender her job to its rightful owner and head back home. Moms stood still more by default than by choice.

Their daughters, the baby boomers, stormed the workplace and turned to legislation and lawsuits to gain a stronghold there—and many of us have refused to stand still to this day. If our daughters look back to see us planted in one spot they're going to be disappointed; they'll have to find another way to measure their progress.

What kind of reference point would my generation of women be, after all, if we traded in our momentum to become highway mileage markers?

I felt more than a little bit betrayed because I always thought the best role models inspired by example. And I was angry at myself for falling under the movie's spell, only to be blindsided by a soft-focus greeting-card sentiment that didn't hold up to scrutiny and sounded more than a little retro.

I wondered if I'd misunderstood. I hoped I had—enough so that I watched "Barbie" again, this time the version that included director Greta Gerwig's play-by-play commentary. (Yes, I watched a movie I didn't want to watch, twice. Sisterhood is powerful, and all that.)

I am relieved to say that my interpretation of the "stand still" line was not what Gerwig intended. She was thinking of two personal experiences: The first, when she watched her young kids run around like crazy safe in the knowledge that Mom, their North Star, had not moved; and the second, her grandmother's death.

That's not what came through. We all stand still at one time or another, but Gerwig's first example was a temporary choice by a busy working-mom, and the second involved no choice at all. Neither one is the equivalent of being our daughters' GPS.

I'll concede that my indignation is in part a function of being old enough to be Gerwig's mother. My generation can be hypersensitive to push back about women's roles, as the list of problems to be solved—access to choice, an enduring gender pay gap—seems to grow rather than shrink.

Consider Gerwig's backyard, for another example: Despite the blinding success of "Barbie," Hollywood remains a dug-in patriarchy, far likelier to hire Ken than Barbie. In a just-released study, the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film gave us the grim numbers: Of the 250 top-grossing films last year, 16% were directed by women, a 2% dip from 2022. The peak achievement for women in film? They represented 26% of producers last year.

Greta Gerwig, like Ruth Handler, is the exception that proves the rule.

I'm glad feminism got a push in "Barbie." I'm glad Gerwig was not suggesting we put on the brakes. It's too soon for any women—moms, not moms, girls, grandmas—to stand still. I hope Barbie's visit to the gynecologist is just the beginning of her quest. I hope she goes out and gets a job.

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

I am half Israeli and half Palestinian. This war feels as if it's killing me twice

By AMIR SOMMER
Los Angeles Times

Amir Sommer is an award-winning poet and author based in Berlin.

As the love child of a Palestinian father and an Israeli mother, all I want to say these days is: Stop, you are killing me twice.

In the last three months, the most notorious conflict of our time has reached new levels of insanity. We are witnessing wholesale violations of international laws in the form of 30-second clips featuring snuff videos, fake news and war crimes. And in reaction to this vast scale of human suffering, we've lost our ability to engage in principled thought and discussion.

Since the war in Gaza began, the side experiencing the most suffering is automatically deemed righteous. You're forced to pick a side, because throwing around words such as "equality" and "coexistence" suddenly feels like spouting nonsense. Stay silent, and bam, you're a traitor. So, the only strategy this war seems to allow is to line up and justify one side's violence. Which is pretty ironic since that's exactly what we're all supposedly against, if we really want peace.

Vietnam, Korea, Northern Ireland, the Iran-Iraq war, World Wars I and II—those deadly conflicts all found resolution. This raises the question: Why is this one still going on?

Perhaps it's because this conflict is multifaceted, encompassing intricate layers of struggle. It is bound to the profound concept of home, the glorification of revenge, post-memory reflections of the Holocaust and the Nakba in 1948. A demographic conflict in which the Palestinian minority was once the majority, and the Israeli majority is acting like a minority. The land's story, the connection to nature—and of course, the ancient religions resident there.

The fight over this land has been very textual since Day One. The place that God promised Abraham, where Jesus was crucified and Muhammad ascended to heaven—all of these moments are parts of the top bestselling books on this planet.

It was the most natural thing for me, someone who was raised among three religions, to become a writer. Given that my parents' marriage was illegal, since interfaith marriages performed within Israel, where I grew up, are not recognized by law, I was considered a bastard. There were very few mixed heritage children like me, so I have always found solace in books, treating them like my lost siblings.

In early October, I made my first trip to the U.S., a lifelong dream. I had come to Los Angeles for a reading of my forthcoming book, "Disco for Peace," where I was a special guest at an event of PoEtikLA, in Silver Lake. Just several minutes before the event started, I received news about what the media called the "Israeli 9/11."

Being half Israeli and half Palestinian, I am accustomed to hearing distressing news. Whenever both places are mentioned, it's rarely positive. That's why when my girlfriend informed me of a new crisis in the Middle East, my response was nonchalant: "What's new?"

She insisted, "No, this time it's serious. Call your family."

In that moment, I felt a mix of sadness and confusion, grappling with the question: Well, who do I call first? My Israeli side or the Palestinian?

Right before the reading started, the host asked for a minute of silence in honor of the people who died in Israel. It all started to click.

Leap forward three months: I have lost people from both sides, though fortunately not from my immediate family.

The range of my loss spans from pen pals I saw only on Zoom because of the border wall, background characters in my life, individuals from the artistic community, and those who shared my upbringing and were more than just childhood friends. I lost someone I once considered one of my best friends during high school. I even saw an acquaintance in one of the gruesome videos circulating on social media. The specter of death has never been as palpable as it is now.

But even in times of bitter grief, we must remember that cruelty doesn't have a single ID card. We're complex characters, heroes to some, villains to others, just like our nations.

That's crystal clear to me, at least: Both sides not only committed violent atrocities but also guilt-tripped the world. However, saying this out loud isn't easy. The whole world is now experiencing what has been my life struggle—deciding whether I'm Israeli or Palestinian (and getting backlash for whichever I choose). Protecting the home by wielding an Uzi or demonstrating for liberation with stones in hand.

Only a few years before this war did I start to find a key to existing with these two halves within me. I left the Middle East and moved to Europe. It felt like coming out of the closet when I could say openly and more easily: I am half Palestinian, half Israeli. That's why this war terrifies me so much—the fear of relapsing into my old identity crisis.

I want to live in a world where I don't have to forsake any part of my identity or history. We must not extinguish the possibility of peace, which for individuals like me is as essential as oxygen, water and bread.

The solution lies not just in a state or two states, but in a state of mind. It begins with how we think, read, and listen to ourselves and others. In my inner storm, patience and tolerance are my guiding lights. Perhaps the world needs to start handling external conflicts with the gentler way we deal with our own internal ones. Having embraced both identities, I wish the Canaanite land could do the same.

The incalculable damage wrought by COVID-19 is everywhere

By DR. CORY FRANKLIN
Chicago Tribune

Dr. Cory Franklin is a retired intensive care physician.

The ledger on COVID-19 has been closed for 2023. But the contagion is not, as some have proclaimed, "over," with the Upper Midwest dealing with a mini-surge that will probably continue through January. Because reporting and interest in general have tailed off, no one has a good idea how many cases are actually occurring, but there are enough that hospitalizations have doubled since autumn.

However, for most, COVID-19 is no longer the serious infection it was in the four previous years. After more than 1 million deaths in those four years—in terms of overall American casualties, think 20 Vietnam Wars, three World War IIs or two Civil Wars—the projection was that the U.S. would experience 100,000 or more deaths in 2023. Yet according to Worldometer, the actual number was just over 70,000 in 2023 and slowing in the second half of the year, as the effects of immunity and vaccination now protect the population.

For Americans today, the mortality of COVID-19—that is, the share of people who contract the virus and die—is less than 1%, and for healthy individuals, it is significantly less than that.

When we review the effects of COVID-19 to date, we should harbor no illusions—the havoc is not merely measured in deaths and long-term disabilities. The incalculable damage wrought is everywhere: undereducated children, increases in suicides and drug overdoses, a general coarsening of society and intensified political division. This political dissonance was aggravated by the physicians and scientists who abandoned their independence during the pandemic. They let politicians exploit them to justify public policy choices.

Some lessons are being learned, albeit too late. Testifying before Congress in May 2020, Dr. Anthony Fauci, who became President Donald Trump's public health spokesperson for the pandemic, acknowledged his lack of expertise in the economic implications of societal lockdowns. Fauci devoted little attention to the unintended consequences of closing down large segments of society, a strategy advocated by most of the public health community.

Now, Francis Collins, former National Institutes of Health chief and Fauci's onetime boss at the NIH, has admitted that the public health mindset of the response to COVID-19 was a mistake.

In an interview that recently resurfaced online, Collins said, "if you're a public health person and you're trying to make a decision, you have this very narrow view of what the right decision is. And that is something that will save a life … so you attach infinite value to stopping the disease and saving a life. You attach zero value to whether this actually totally disrupts people's lives, ruins the economy and has many kids kept out of school in a way that they never quite recover from."

This admission is a positive step forward by an influential scientist. Putting the science into perspective, Collins, a nonconformist in the scientific community, has described himself as a "serious Christian" who has attempted to bridge the gap between science and faith. That's why it was somewhat uncharacteristic that until now, he marched in lockstep with the initial zealous public health approach to limit spread of the virus through lockdowns.

Will he also admit to another serious misstep that he and Fauci committed—the attempt to silence the scientists who authored the Great Barrington Declaration, which advocated an alternative approach to confronting the pandemic? Their notion was to focus protection on the elderly and vulnerable groups, while allowing the rest of us to lead normal lives. In retrospect, the authors of the Great Barrington Declaration probably oversold their plan—the pandemic would likely have proceeded apace even with their approach, but there may have been less collateral damage. What Fauci and Collins did, however, amounted to scientific censorship and constituted a serious breach in scientific ethics: Scientists must maintain their objectivity in the search for the truth.

Many want to forget all this and move on, but no one should ignore the incalculable damage caused to our country and the rent it has put in the social fabric and our institutions. There is much to be gleaned from this, but there is a sense that rather than learn from the experience, many of the actors will attempt to rewrite their role in history to portray their actions in a more favorable light.

As the COVID-19 pandemic moves into its fifth year, it is not the beast that raged through the world in 2020 and 2021. The contagion is by no means done with us—there will likely be seasonal and sporadic outbreaks for years, and things could always change if a more lethal variant mutation pops up. For now, though, it poses little more than an inconvenience to most people and a serious threat only to an unfortunate minority. It is the whimper, not the bang, we hoped it would become.

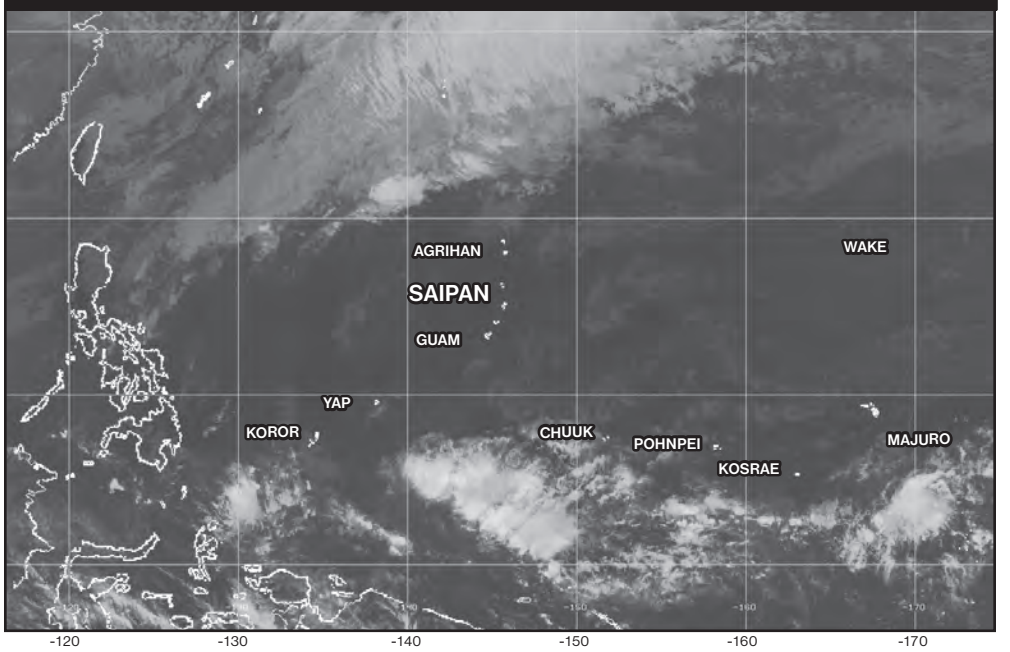
It has been said that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Of course, the unfortunate corollary is that even if you do learn from history, you may well be condemned to repeat it. It is only a question of time.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Partly cloudy. Isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy. Isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph.	Breezy at times. Partly cloudy with 10 percent chance of showers.	Breezy at times. Partly cloudy with 10 percent chance of showers.	Breezy at times. Partly cloudy with 10 percent chance of showers.
86 79º	86 79º	86 79º	86 79º	86 79º

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 8:17 AM WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite loops show cloudiness and patchy showers have been moving across the Marianas overnight. Fresh trade winds across the region this morning are occasionally gusting to near 25 kt. Buoys show combined seas mostly in the 6 to 8 foot range from the northeast and east. Ipan buoy water temperature is 84 degrees.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°
Palau	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°
Yap	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	84° / 80°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	83° / 79°
Kosrae	Partly Cloudy	84° / 79°
Majuro	Thunderstorms	84° / 80°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:45 AM	6:03 PM
Friday	6:46 AM	6:03 PM
Saturday	6:46 AM	6:04 PM
Sunday	6:46 AM	6:05 PM
Monday	6:46 AM	6:05 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Thursday	6:22 AM	5:44 PM	-
Friday	7:22 AM	6:51 PM	-
Saturday	8:18 AM	7:57 PM	-
Sunday	9:07 AM	8:59 PM	-
Sunday	9:52 AM	9:58 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	72° / 60°
Beijing	Sunny	36° / 11°
Hong Kong	Cloudy	54° / 46°
Honolulu	Sunny	81° / 69°
London	Mostly Cloudy	43° / 40°
Los Angeles	Mostly Sunny	74° / 49°
Manila	Partly Cloudy	84° / 73°
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	95° / 62°
Miami	Cloudy	75° / 69°
New York	Sunny	41° / 30°
Osaka	Mostly Cloudy	46° / 36°
Paris	Partly Cloudy	40° / 36°
Busan	Cloudy	40° / 27°
Rome	Showers	51° / 38°
Salem	Showers	49° / 39°
San Francisco	Mostly Cloudy	58° / 44°
Seoul	Mostly Cloudy	29° / 11°
Tokyo	Mostly Cloudy	46° / 34°
Washington, DC	Sunny	45° / 26°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
1:19 AM	Low Tide	-0.79
8:45 AM	High Tide	1.77
1:47 PM	Low Tide	1.21
6:30 PM	High Tide	1.82

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SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Friday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of $180. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Investigation into why panel blew off Boeing Max 9 jet focuses on missing bolts

By DAVID KOENIG and TOM KRISHER
AP BUSINESS WRITERS

AP

This photo released by the National Transportation Safety Board shows a gaping hole where the paneled-over door had been at the fuselage plug area of Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 on Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024, in Portland, Ore.

The extended grounding of some Boeing 737 Max jetliners is adding to pressure on Boeing and the subcontractor that made the fuselage and installed a panel that blew out leaving a gaping hole in an Alaska Airlines plane last week.

Investigators know the sequence of events that led to the blowout Friday night, but they don't know the cause. A key question is whether bolts used to help secure the panel, called a door plug, were installed. A National Transportation Safety Board investigator says the bolts have not been recovered and the agency won't know if they were even in place until the door plug is examined in a laboratory.

Adding to Boeing's problems, Alaska Airlines and United Airlines—the two U.S. carriers that fly the Max 9—reported finding loose bolts and other hardware in other panels, suggesting quality issues with the door plugs are not limited to one plane.

The plugs are installed in Max 9 fuselages by subcontractor Spirit AeroSystems, which was spun off by Boeing in 2005. Spirit has a history of manufacturing problems, many uncovered in a U.S. House probe of two fatal crashes involving Boeing 737 Max 8 planes.

"The focus needs to turn to Spirit," said former congressman Peter DeFazio, who chaired the investigating committee. "Boeing has been happy with the crappy stuff from Spirit because it's cheap."

The company said in a statement Monday that "quality and product integrity" are a priority. "Spirit is a committed partner with Boeing on the 737 program, and we continue to work together with them on this matter," it said.

The process of inspecting Max 9s and returning them to service has been slower than Alaska and United had hoped. The Federal Aviation Administration grounded all Max 9s in the United States on Saturday until they could be inspected, but Boeing didn't provide inspection instructions until Monday.

On Tuesday, the FAA said those instructions were being revised "because of feedback," and it extended the grounding of the planes.

"The safety of the flying public, not speed, will determine the timeline for returning the Boeing 737-9 Max to service," the FAA said in a statement.

However, the inspection delays threw airline schedules into turmoil.

United said it canceled another 170 flights Tuesday because of the grounding. Alaska said it scrubbed 109 flights because it couldn't fly Max 9s.

The part that failed on the Alaska flight is installed on some Boeing jets when airliners don't have enough seats to require more emergency exits. The plugs are lighter than an aircraft door, reducing the plane's weight and saving fuel. They are common on cargo planes that have been converted from passenger use.

During a briefing late Monday, NTSB officials described how the plug on Alaska flight 1282 rolled upward and flew off the jet. Four bolts and 12 connecting points between the plug and the door frame are supposed to prevent that from happening.

BOG Hagåtña City Run & Block Party returns bigger than ever

HAGÅTÑA, Guam—Bank of Guam announced yesterday the return of the Hagåtña City Run & Block Party.

After a successful return to the heart of Hagåtña last year, Bank of Guam takes to the streets once again to kick off its 52nd Founder's Day anniversary with even more reasons to celebrate. The bank's signature event enters its 17th year and is set for Saturday, March 9, 2024, with festivities set to begin at 5:30pm at the Plaza de España and Guam Museum grounds.

» A purpose-driven celebration benefitting American Cancer Society and Guam Cancer Care

Get ready for an unforgettable sunset 5K, experience local entertainment, a 3-on-3 basketball tournament hosted by Clutch Guam, a Kids Zone featuring rides and activities for kids of all ages, food trucks, novelty vendors and a showcase of non-profit organizations allowing them to spread awareness for some very important causes.

Bank of Guam said all proceeds will benefit both Guam Cancer Care and the Guam Chapter of the American Cancer Society.

"Over the years, our commitment toward the fight against cancer continues to grow and so does our belief that no one should fight alone. This year, we proudly commit 100% of our proceeds to both of our local cancer organizations who together, continue to advocate for our cancer survivors and caregivers," said Joaquin P. LG. Cook, Bank of Guam's president and chief executive officer. "We couldn't think of a better of a better way celebrate 52 years as 'The People's Bank' than doing the thing that means the most—celebrating our people. …I encourage everyone to come out and join us as we celebrate another year in service to our community but also, celebrate this fight and our spirit as a community to uplift and inspire those who need it most."

Ed Lee, who is a development manager at the Guam Field Office of the American Cancer Society, said that Bank of Guam continues to be a big-hearted community partner with the American Cancer Society over many decades.

"The Hagåtña City Run & Block Party is an extension of the many ways Bank of Guam finds to support the people of Guam that have been affected by cancer. Our fight against cancer is stronger than ever with this partnership and we look forward to the big event." Lee added.

Nona Perez, Cancer Outreach manager of Guam Cancer Care, said Bank of Guam's unwavering support and partnership over the years have strengthened its mission and raised awareness and critical funding for cancer assistance.

"Thank you to Bank of Guam for continuing to make a meaningful impact on our families affected by cancer in Guam," she added.

Look out for early-bird registration specials and pop-up registration events leading up to the big party, along with registration deadlines and packet pickup. Follow Bank of Guam on Instagram and Facebook and bankofguam.com for updates. In the meantime, here is a sneak peak of the race details.

■ Showtime at 4:30pm and Go-Time at 5:30pm starting at the Guam Museum;

■ Race Prizes for top male and female finishers in various age divisions;

Not a runner? That's okay. Bring the entire family and enjoy one of the biggest block parties on island. Entry to the block party is free for all. Purchase food and support local businesses while helping to raise funds toward the fight against cancer.

Join the fun and festivities! To sponsor, volunteer, or set up as a food, novelty, or non- profit partner, feel free to reach out to brand@bankofguam.com. ***(PR)***

AP-NORC, AAPI DATE POLLS SHOW:

Economy tops US priorities for government across racial groups

WASHINGTON (AP)—Americans of various racial backgrounds largely agree that the government should focus on the economy and foreign policy issues in 2024, but recent polling shows that views among racial groups diverge on some high-profile topics, including racism and immigration.

About 7 in 10 U.S. adults across racial backgrounds—including white, Black, Hispanic and Asian adults—name issues related to the economy in an open-ended question that asks people to share up to five topics they would like the government to prioritize in 2024, making it the most commonly mentioned issue for each group, as well as for U.S. adults overall at 76%.

Inflation specifically stood out as a major issue. About 3 in 10 adults who are white, AAPI or Hispanic list inflation as an important focus for 2024. About 2 in 10 Black adults also listed inflation as a top concern.

The data on U.S. adults overall—including Black, Hispanic and white adults—comes from an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted in December. The data on AAPI communities comes from an AAPI Data/AP-NORC poll that aims to improve the survey data available about Asian American communities in the U.S., which are often underrepresented in public opinion research.

On some issues beyond the economy, views diverge.

Immigration was named as a top priority for government action by 43% of Hispanic adults, 36% of white adults and 29% of Asians and Pacific Islanders, but only 19% of Black adults. Black and AAPI adults are less likely than white and Hispanic adults to say the government should work on the country's involvement overseas. About one quarter of white and Hispanic adults mention this as an issue to prioritize, compared to 7% for both Black and AAPI adults.

"You've got so many people crossing the border," said Rick Chan, an artificial intelligence engineer in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"People should obey the laws when coming into the country," said Chan, who is Chinese American.

White adults were more likely than adults from other racial and ethnic groups to name politics as an important issue for the upcoming year. Four in 10 white adults name politics as a necessary focal point for the government, compared to 2 in 10 Black or AAPI adults. About one-third of Hispanic adults consider politics an important focus. White adults are also more likely than non-white adults to be concerned about government spending, government corruption and taxes.

"We always have to have a budget in place to keep the government from shutting down. I don't think the Republicans look at it that way," said Jim O'Leary, a former railroad worker from Missouri. O'Leary, who is white, thinks the government should be most focused on the economy and democracy issues.

A Democrat, O'Leary said he wanted the government to take greater action on the federal budget but opposes hard-right economic policies. "They just don't see the bigger picture," O'Leary said, citing proposed budget cuts by conservative lawmakers in ongoing negotiations on Capitol Hill. He feels Trump is too polarizing a figure to return to office.

"I mean, he wants to be a dictator. If that guy gets back in, we'll be in real trouble," O'Leary said.

"I believe what we what we need to focus on most is election integrity. I think we're down the drain if we don't get some kind of election integrity back," said Jerry Lassiter, a retired human resource specialist. Lassiter, who is white, said that corruption in government, the prosecution of rioters who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and immigration were other top issues he felt the government needed to focus on in 2024.

Nation

WITH TRUMP PRESENT IN COURT

Judges express skepticism of claims he's immune from prosecution

WASHINGTON (AP)—With Donald Trump listening intently in the courtroom, federal appeals court judges in Washington expressed deep skepticism Tuesday that the former president was immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The panel of three judges, two of whom were appointed by President Joe Biden, also questioned whether they had jurisdiction to consider the appeal at this point in the case, raising the prospect that Trump's appeal could be dispensed with on more procedural grounds.

During lengthy arguments, the judges repeatedly pressed Trump's lawyer to defend claims that Trump was shielded from criminal charges for acts that he says fell within his official duties as president. That argument was rejected last month by the lower-court judge overseeing the case against Trump, and the appeals judges suggested through their questions that they, too, were dubious that the Founding Fathers envisioned absolute immunity for presidents after they leave office.

"I think it's paradoxical to say that his constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed allows him to violate criminal law," said Judge Karen LeCraft Henderson, an appointee of former President George H.W. Bush.

The outcome could carry enormous ramifications both for the landmark criminal case against Trump and for the broader, and legally untested, question of whether an ex-president can be prosecuted for actions taken in the White House. It will also likely set the stage for further appeals before the U.S. Supreme Court, which last month declined a request to weigh in but could still get involved later.

A swift decision is crucial for special counsel Jack Smith and his team, who are eager to get the case—now paused pending the appeal—to trial before the November election. But Trump's lawyers, in addition to seeking to get the case dismissed, are hoping to benefit from a protracted appeals process that could delay the trial well past its scheduled March 4 start date, including until potentially after the election.

AP

This artist sketch depicts former President Donald Trump, seated right, listening as his attorney D. John Sauer, standing, speaks before the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals at the federal courthouse, Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024 in Washington.

Underscoring the importance to both sides, Trump, the 2024 Republican presidential primary front-runner, attended Tuesday's arguments even though the Iowa caucuses are just one week away and despite the fact that there's no requirement that defendants appear in person for such proceedings. Making his first court appearance in Washington since his arraignment in August, Trump sat at the defense table, watching closely and occasionally taking notes and speaking with his lawyers.

His appearance and his comments afterward underscored his broader effort to portray himself as the victim of a justice system he claims is politicized. Though there's no evidence Biden has had any influence on the case, Trump's argument could resonate with Republican voters in Iowa as they prepare to launch the presidential nomination process.

After the hearing, Trump spoke to reporters at The Waldorf-Astoria hotel, which used to be the Trump International Hotel, calling Tuesday "a very momentous day." He insisted he did nothing wrong and claimed he was being prosecuted for political reasons.

"A president has to have immunity," he said.

Secrecy surrounding the defense secretary's hospitalization put White House on defensive

WASHINGTON (AP)—President Joe Biden's administration pledged from day one to restore truth and transparency to the federal government—but now it's facing a maelstrom of criticism and credibility questions after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's hospitalization was kept secret for days, even from the White House.

The controversy has prompted a government-wide review of what protocols are in place to prevent such failures and the Pentagon is scrutinizing its own procedures following the extraordinary lapse, which left even Austin's top deputies unaware of his condition for days. Senior congressional Republicans are investigating whether Austin ignored legal requirements to inform Congress, and Biden administration officials are privately fuming about Austin's lack of disclosure, believing it to be an unforced error that undercuts the president's message of restoring competency through his administration.

The prolonged focus on a senior official's medical secrecy is also shedding an unwelcome spotlight on Biden's own health, which already was under scrutiny as the oldest president in history seeks another term and faces regular questions and concerns from voters about his age. Combined, the questions over transparency and health have put the White House on the defensive for days as the election year opens and have given ammunition to Biden political opponents who question whether his administration is living up to its pledges of competency.

The Pentagon disclosed Tuesday afternoon, after days of silence on Austin's medical diagnosis, that the secretary has prostate cancer. Austin, 70, was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Dec. 22 and underwent surgery to treat the disease, but developed a urinary tract infection a week later and was admitted into intensive care. He remained hospitalized Tuesday.

Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer during a routine screening in early December, but the White House insisted that no one there, including Biden, knew about the diagnosis until Tuesday.

"I think we all recognize — and I think the Pentagon has been very, very honest with themselves — about the challenge to credibility by what has transpired here, and by how hard it was for them to be fully transparent with the American people," John Kirby, spokesman for the National Security Council, said Tuesday. "We all recognize that this didn't unfold the way it should have — on so many levels."

There is no government-wide policy in the Biden administration on how absences of Cabinet officials should be handled, according to people familiar with the matter, although there is a general expectation that the White House should be made aware of such circumstances. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss government practices.

Northeast seeing heavy rain, winds as storms that walloped much of US roll through region

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP)—A storm packing high winds and heavy rain was sweeping through the Northeast early Wednesday, while wild winter weather elsewhere brought tornadoes and deadly accidents in the Midwest and South, flood threats in Florida and blizzards in the Northwest.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy already declared a state of emergency Tuesday afternoon and New York City officials evacuated nearly 2,000 migrants housed at a sprawling tent complex ahead of predicted wind speeds that could top 70 mph (112 kph) at times.

In Maine, Gov. Janet Mills delayed the opening of all state offices until noon Wednesday due to the storm.

The National Weather Service warned of possible major flooding in portions of Long Island with up to 9-foot (2.7-meter) seas through Wednesday morning and a chance of major and minor flooding along streams and rivers throughout the Tri-State area, even though rain was expected to tail off.

The wild weather came as portions of the Northeast were still digging out from a nor'easter that dumped more than a foot of snow in some areas over the weekend.

On Tuesday, the same weather system brought heavy rain, hail and at least three reported tornadoes to the South before moving eastward.

Rain and high winds extended into the nation's capital Tuesday night, forcing Vice President Kamala Harris' aircraft to divert from Joint Base Andrews to Dulles International Airport near Washington when it encountered wind shear — a sudden shift in wind direction or speed.

Near Cottonwood, Alabama, a small city near the Georgia and Florida borders, 81-year-old Charlotte Paschal was killed when her mobile home was tossed from its foundation, the Houston County coroner said. A suspected tornado had touched down in the area.

Police in Clayton County, south of Atlanta, said a man died during heavy rain when a tree fell on his car on a state highway in Jonesboro.

More than 80 public school systems across Georgia called off classes entirely while others taught students online or delayed the start of in-person classes.

In North Carolina, one person died and two others were in critical condition after a suspected tornado struck a mobile home park in the town of Claremont, north of Charlotte, said Amy McCauley, a spokesperson for Catawba County.

A possible tornado knocked down several old brick storefronts in downtown Bamberg, South Carolina, blocking the main intersection through the city about 60 miles (96 kilometers) south of Columbia. Thousands of bricks blocked U.S. 301, the main road through that part of the state, and about 40 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, said Democratic Rep. Justin Bamberg, who represents the area.

Storm-related injuries were reported in Florida, but no deaths. A section of Panama City Beach showed parts of roofs blown away, furniture, fences and debris strewn about, and a house that appeared tilted on its side, leaning on another home.

The National Weather Service office in Tallahassee planned to send out three tornado survey teams on Wednesday to examine suspected tornado damage in Walton, Bay and Jackson counties in Florida, and two more on Thursday to look at Houston County, Alabama, and Calhoun County, Georgia.

Asia

Taiwan mistranslates an alert saying China launched missile

AP

A TV monitor in Taipei, Taiwan flashes news that a satellite launched from China passed over southern Taiwan, Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024.

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP)—Taiwan's Defense Ministry mistranslated an alert into English on Tuesday, saying China had launched a missile instead of a satellite and urging caution days before the island's elections.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Saturday that China has described as a choice between war and peace.

The bilingual alert sent to residents' mobile phones cautioned in English that there was a missile flyover. The Defense Ministry later issued a statement apologizing to the public for the faulty English translation and clarifying that China had launched a rocket carrying a satellite -- not a missile.

The ministry said the Chinese rocket flew over southern Taiwan at high altitude.

Chinese state media said the country launched a satellite called Einstein with a Long March 2C rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province in southwestern China. Broadcaster CCTV said the satellite entered orbit and the launch was a success.

The alerts went off in the middle of an international news conference by Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. He clarified it was a satellite launch, told journalists not to worry, and proceeded with the news conference.

"We need to stay responsible; we need to stay moderate in order to prevent (a) conflict from happening between Taiwan and China," he said.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who was in the southern city of Kaohsiung, urged the public not to worry, according to local media.

Beijing views Taiwan, which is about 160 kilometers (100 miles) off China's east coast, as a renegade province that must come under its control.

Beijing has intensified its military harassment of the island inhabited by 23 million people in recent months, sending military vessels and aircraft near it almost daily. Beijing has also been flying balloons—which are feared to be used for surveillance—near the island despite Taiwan's complaints.

ASIAN BRIEFS

More than 200 people died since Japan's New Year's quakes. 7 of them died in shelters

TOKYO (AP)—As of Wednesday, 203 deaths were reported following the 7.6 magnitude quake that slammed the western coastline of Japan on New Year's. Seven of them were at evacuation centers, where rescued people died from injuries and sickness. Such deaths weren't directly caused by the quakes, fires and mudslides. They happened in alleged safety. "The pressures and stress of living in a place you aren't used to lead to such deaths," said Shigeru Nishimori, a disaster official at Ishikawa Prefecture, the hardest hit region. Nearly 30,000 people whose homes were destroyed or deemed unsafe were staying at schools and other makeshift facilities. Even minor rain and snow can set off landslides where the ground is loose from the more than 1,000 aftershocks that rattled the region for more than a week. Half-collapsed homes might flatten. Deaths from the New Year's temblor centered on Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture have climbed daily, as rescue teams drew bodies from the rubble. Of the deaths, 91 were in Suzu city, 81 in Wajima, 20 in Anamizu, with the rest in smaller numbers among four other towns. The number of missing people declined in recent days to 68. Those injured totaled 566, and 1,787 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, according to Ishikawa officials.

Filipino Catholics pray for Mideast peace in massive procession venerating black statue of Jesus

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—A massive crowd of mostly barefoot Catholic worshippers marched Tuesday in an annual procession in the Philippines' capital that paraded a centuries-old black statue of Jesus. Many said they prayed for peace in the Middle East, where tens of thousands of Filipinos work, as fears rise of a spread of the Israel-Hamas war, now in its fourth month. Considered a major annual Catholic event in Asia, the procession was cancelled during the coronavirus pandemic and last year, after pandemic restrictions eased, the statue was not paraded to discourage larger crowds. The procession on Tuesday took 15 hours and the crowd of devotees—many in maroon shirts imprinted with the image of the Black Nazarene—at one point swelled to more than 2 million, according to a police estimate. Red Cross volunteers treated more than 360 worshipers, mainly for bruises, but at least five were hospitalized, including one who sustained head injuries when he fell to the ground while attempting to climb onto the carriage carrying the statue. Police were on high alert during the event in Manila's Quiapo district, following a Dec. 3 bombing that killed four people and wounded dozens of Catholic worshippers attending Mass at a university in the southern Philippines.

World

A video appears to show Israeli army shot 3 Palestinians, killing 1

BEIT RIMA, West Bank (AP)—Security camera video from a West Bank village shows a young man standing in a central square when he is suddenly shot and drops to the ground. Two others rushing to his aid are also hit, leaving a 17-year-old dead, moments before Israeli military jeeps roll in.

An Associated Press review of the video and interviews with the two wounded survivors showed Israeli soldiers opened fire on the three when they did not appear to pose a threat. One of the wounded Palestinians was shot a second time after he got up and tried to hop away.

The fatal shooting in the village of Beit Rima last week is the latest in a series of incidents in which soldiers appeared to fire without provocation, a trend Palestinians say has worsened since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza three months ago.

The Israeli military said troops entered Beit Rima overnight Thursday into Friday as part of a "counter-terrorism operation." It said troops fired at suspects who threw explosives and firebombs at them.

The video, obtained by the AP from a local smoke shop, does not show anyone throwing explosives.

After reviewing the footage, a military spokesperson said soldiers reported that one of the Palestinians—visible kneeling in front of an object just outside the frame—was igniting a Molotov cocktail when he was shot.

The video, however, shows that the first shot does not hit the kneeling man, but rather another Palestinian man, Nader Rimawi. Nader told the AP that the object was a stack of cardboard boxes and scraps of paper that 17-year-old Osaid Rimawi had gathered and was preparing to light to keep the men warm.

Other videos of the shooting posted to social media and reviewed by AP appear consistent with Nader's description of the object Osaid was preparing to light. It is possible videos taken from other angles could further illuminate what happened.

In interviews with the AP, the wounded village residents denied having thrown explosives and said the shootings, about 2 a.m. Friday, were unprovoked.

Two of the six Rimawi brothers were in the town square when word spread that Israeli soldiers were in the village. They said they were aware of the army presence, but that there had been no confrontations. "We were with the young men standing at the roundabout of the town," said Mohammed Rimawi, 25. "We started looking around as we were standing and not doing anything."

The half-hour security camera video begins about 20 minutes before the shootings with men gathering in small groups, walking in and out of the frame as cars come and go. Some men gesture elsewhere in the village.

The crowd in the frame eventually thins to under 10 men. Then they scatter as a shot hits Mohammed's brother, 29-year-old Nader, in the left leg.

The video shows Mohammed running to help before being shot.

"We saw a sniper who started shooting. He shot him. I went to help him. Then he shot me," said Mohammed, who was struck by a bullet in his right hip.

The video shows Osaid rushing to aid them as he slips something into his pocket. He is quickly shot and later dies of his wounds. His brother, Islam Rimawi, later told AP that he found a lighter, 20 shekels ($5.36), and a pack of cigarettes in Osaid's pocket.

Armed men storm Ecuador TV studio during live broadcast as attacks in country escalate

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador (AP)—Masked men broke onto the set of a public television channel in Ecuador waving guns and explosives during a live broadcast Tuesday, and the president issued a decree declaring that the violence-plagued country had entered an "internal armed conflict."

The men armed with pistols and what looked like sticks of dynamite entered the set of the TC Television network in the port city of Guayaquil during a news program that was airing live in thousands of homes across the nation and shouted that they had bombs. Noises similar to gunshots could be heard.

No one was killed in the attack, and authorities later said that all the masked intruders had been arrested, 13 in all, and would be charged with terrorism.

Authorities have not said who was behind the television station occupation, or a series of other attacks that have shaken the South American country recently, but they follow the apparent escapes from prison of two leaders of Ecuador's most powerful drug gangs.

Alina Manrique, the head of news for TC Television, said she was in the control room at TC Television, across from the studio, when the masked men burst into the building. One of them pointed a gun at her head and told her to get on the floor, Manrique said.

The incident was aired live, although the station's signal was cut off after about 15 minutes. Manrique said some of the assailants ran from the studio and tried to hide when they realized they were surrounded by police.

"I am still in shock" Manrique told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "Everything has collapsed .... All I know is that its time to leave this country and go very far away."

Ecuador has been rocked by a series of attacks, including the abductions of several police officers, in the wake of a notorious gang leader's apparent weekend escape from prison. President Daniel Noboa on Monday declared a national state of emergency, a measure that lets authorities suspend people's rights and mobilize the military in places like prisons.

Shortly after the gunmen stormed the TV station, Noboa issued another decree designating 20 drug trafficking gangs operating in the country as terrorist groups and authorizing Ecuador's military to "neutralize" them within the bounds of international humanitarian law. It also said the country had entered an internal armed conflict.

Ecuador's attorney general's office said the 13 people arrested will be charged with terrorism. It tweeted that it will present the charges in coming hours. Ecuadorian law establishes a penalty of up to 13 years in prison for anyone convicted of terrorism.

Environment

‘Earth shattered **global heat records** in ‘23 and is flirting with **WARMING LIMIT**’

AP

The cracked earth of the Sau reservoir is visible north of Barcelona, Spain, March 20, 2023. Earth last year shattered global annual heat records, the European climate agency said Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024.

By SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

Earth last year shattered global annual heat records, flirted with the world’s agreed-upon warming threshold and showed more signs of a feverish planet, the European climate agency said Tuesday.

The European climate agency Copernicus said the year was 1.48 degrees Celsius (2.66 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times. That’s barely below the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit that the world hoped to stay within in the 2015 Paris climate accord to avoid the most severe effects of warming.

And January 2024 is on track to be so warm that for the first time a 12-month period will exceed the 1.5-degree threshold, Copernicus Deputy Director Samantha Burgess said. Scientists have repeatedly said that Earth would need to average 1.5 degrees of warming over two or three decades to be a technical breach of the threshold.

The 1.5 degree goal “has to be (kept) alive because lives are at risk and choices have to be made,” Burgess said. “And these choices don’t impact you and I but they impact our children and our grandchildren.”

The record heat made life miserable and sometimes deadly in Europe, North America, China and many other places last year. But scientists say a warming climate is also to blame for more extreme weather events, like the lengthy drought that devastated the Horn of Africa, the torrential downpours that wiped out dams and killed thousands in Libya and the Canada wildfires that fouled the air from North America to Europe.

In a separate Tuesday press event, international climate scientists who calculate global warming’s role in extreme weather, the group’s leader, Imperial College climate scientist Friederike Otto said “we definitely see in our analysis the strong impact of it being the hottest year.”

The World Weather Attribution team only looks at events that affect at least 1 million people or kill more than 100 people. But Otto said her team was overwhelmed with more than 160 of those in 2023, and could only conduct 14 studies, many of them on killer heat waves. “Basically every heat wave that is occurring today has been made more likely and is hotter because of human-induced climate change,” she said.

The United States lurched through 28 weather disasters last year that caused at least $1 billion in damage, smashing the old record of 22 set in 2020, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Tuesday. The number of these costly disasters, which are adjusted to account for inflation, has soared, averaging only three per year in the 1980s and just under six per year in the 1990s.

The U.S. billion-dollar disasters last year included a drought, four floods, 19 severe storms, 2 hurricanes, a wildfire and a winter storm. They combined to kill 492 people and cause nearly $93 billion in damage, according to NOAA.

Antarctic sea ice hit record low levels in 2023 and broke eight monthly records for low sea ice, Copernicus reported.

Copernicus calculated that the global average temperature for 2023 was about one-sixth of a degree Celsius (0.3 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the old record set in 2016. While that seems a small amount in global record-keeping, it’s an exceptionally large margin for the new record, Burgess said. Earth’s average temperature for 2023 was 14.98 degrees Celsius (58.96 degrees Fahrenheit), Copernicus calculated.

> **“It was record-breaking for seven months. We had the warmest June, July, August, September, October, November, December. It wasn’t just a season or a month that was exceptional. It was exceptional for over half the year.”**

“It was record-breaking for seven months. We had the warmest June, July, August, September, October, November, December,” Burgess said. “It wasn’t just a season or a month that was exceptional. It was exceptional for over half the year.”

There are several factors that made 2023 the warmest year on record, but by far the biggest factor was the ever-increasing amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that trap heat, Burgess said. Those gases come from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas.

Other factors including the natural El Nino—a temporary warming of the central Pacific that alters weather worldwide—other natural oscillations in the Arctic, southern and Indian oceans, increased solar activity and the 2022 eruption of an undersea volcano that sent water vapor into the atmosphere, Burgess said.

Malte Meinshausen, a University of Melbourne climate scientist, said about 1.3 degrees Celsius of the warming comes from greenhouse gases, with another 0.1 degrees Celsius from El Nino and the rest being smaller causes.

Copernicus records only go back to 1940 and are based on a combination of observations and forecast models. Other groups, including the United States’ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and NASA, the United Kingdom’s Meteorological Office and Berkeley Earth go back to the mid-1800s and will announce their calculations for 2023 on Friday, with expectations of record-breaking marks.

The Japanese Meteorological Agency, which uses similar techniques as Copernicus and goes back to 1948, late last month estimated that it was the warmest year at 1.47 degrees Celsius (2.64 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. The University of Alabama Huntsville global dataset, which uses satellite measurements rather than ground data and dates to 1979, last week also found it the hottest year on record, but not by as much.

Though actual observations only date back less than two centuries, several scientists say evidence from tree rings and ice cores suggest this is the warmest the Earth has been in more than 100,000 years.

“It basically means that our cities, our roads, our monuments, our farms, in practice all human activities never had to cope with the climate this warm,” Copernicus Director Carlo Buontempo said at a Tuesday press conference. “There were simply no cities, no books, agriculture or domesticated animals on this planet the last time the temperature was so high.”

For the first time, Copernicus recorded a day where the world averaged at least 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) more than pre-industrial times. It happened twice and narrowly missed a third day around Christmas, Burgess said.

And for the first time, every day of the year was at least one degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial times. For nearly half the year—173 days—the world was 1.5 degrees warmer than the mid-1800s.

Meinshausen, the Australian climate scientist, said it’s natural for the public to wonder whether the 1.5-degree target is lost. He said it’s important for people to keep trying to rein in warming.

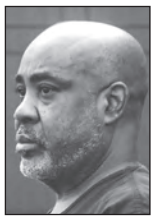
“We are not abolishing a speed limit, because somebody exceeded the speed limit,” he said. “We double our efforts to step on the brakes.”

But Buontempo said it’s only going to get hotter: “Following the current trajectory in a few years’ time the record-breaking year of 2023 will probably be remembered as a cold year.”

Life & Style

Man charged in killing of Tupac Shakur allowed $750K bail, house arrest

LAS VEGAS (AP)—A Nevada judge set bail Tuesday at $750,000 for a former Los Angeles-area gang leader charged with orchestrating the killing of hip-hop legend Tupac Shakur in 1996, saying he can serve house arrest with electronic monitoring ahead of trial on a murder charge.


Davis

Court-appointed attorneys for Duane "Keffe D" Davis told The Associated Press after the judge's decision that they believe Davis can post that amount. They had asked for bail of not more than $100,000 and noted for the judge that the demands of preparing a defense based on two decades of evidence may require a postponement of the current June trial date.

Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson told reporters that he expects Clark County District Judge Carli Kierny will hold a "source hearing" to determine whether money posted for bail is legally obtained. The judge did not set a new trial date but called for a status check Feb. 20.

Prosecutors Binu Palal and Marc DiGiacomo argued Tuesday that Davis has never left gang life, that his 15 years of admissions about his role in Shakur's killing show he is guilty of murder, and that a jailhouse phone call in October suggested he poses a threat to witnesses.

"There is one constant," Palal told the judge. "Mr. Davis has consistently admitted to being architect of the murder."

DiGiacomo called Davis "a very, very high danger to the community."

The judge, in her ruling, acknowledged that Davis "made a living talking about his past life as a leader of the South Side Crips," a street gang in his hometown of Compton, California, "and also the killing of Mr. Shakur in graphic detail."

Robert Arroyo and co-counsel Charles Cano argued that police and prosecutors could have arrested Davis 15 years ago but didn't, and that the prosecutors were wrong with their interpretation of the jail telephone call and a list of names provided to Davis' family. The defense lawyers said it is Davis and his family who are at risk.

Arroyo and Cano said their 60-year-old client is in poor health after battling cancer, which is in remission, and said he would not flee to avoid trial.

They also downplayed evidence against Davis as the product of tales told by witnesses with gang backgrounds that make them not credible, and noted the prosecution lacks evidence, including the gun and the car involved in the September 1996 drive-by shooting that killed Shakur.

Arroyo focused Tuesday on what he called "the obvious question" dating to 2008 and 2009—when Davis talked with police in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. He went on to write a 2019 tell-all memoir and began giving interviews on social media in which he described his role as gang leader and "shot-caller" in Shakur's death.

"If his guilt is so overwhelming, what's been happening for 15 years?" Arroyo asked in court Tuesday. "Why did we wait 15 years to make the arrest?"

Davis was arrested Sept. 29 outside his home in suburban Henderson, which Las Vegas police had searched in mid-July. He pleaded not guilty in November to first-degree murder and has been jailed without bail at the Clark County Detention Center in Las Vegas, where detainees' phone calls are routinely recorded. If convicted at trial, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

Arroyo argued Tuesday that his client's accounts in "the YouTube world" accentuated violence to attract viewers and make money.

"Conflict sells," Arroyo said. "They get on these interviews, they puff out their chest. They're trying to get clicks."

Prosecutors say Davis' own words are strong evidence that he is responsible for the crime, even if he didn't pull the trigger. DiGiacomo said other people who have described Davis' role in other media interviews, and to police, corroborate his accounts.

Irish singer Sinead O'Connor died from natural causes

LONDON (AP)—Irish singer-songwriter Sinéad O'Connor died from "natural causes" in July, a coroner said Tuesday.

O'Connor

London's Metropolitan Police had said the singer's death was not considered suspicious after she was found unresponsive at a home in southeast London on July 26. O'Connor was 56.

The Southwark Coroner's Court confirmed that O'Connor died of natural causes, which means circumstances when an illness or condition is not linked to external forces. It did not provide details.

The singer, who began her career performing on the streets of Dublin, rose to worldwide fame with her cover of Prince's ballad "Nothing Compares 2 U," released in 1990.

O'Connor was public about her mental illness and was hospitalized after her teenage son, Shane, died by suicide in 2022.

A lifelong non-conformist, O'Connor was known for her outspoken political and cultural stances and fierce criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, long before allegations of sexual abuse in the clergy were widely reported.

Thousands of fans lined the streets of Bray, the Irish town she had called home, during a funeral procession in August. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar attended, along with U2's Bono.

Lindsay Lohan, Reneé Rapp, and stars of new 'Mean Girls' turn out for premiere

NEW YORK (AP)—She doesn't even go here, but Lindsay Lohan still joined the cast of the new "Mean Girls" at the musical film's premiere Monday night in New York.

Lohan

Lohan, the star of the original 2004 film, reunited with Tina Fey—who wrote both the classic film, the Broadway show it inspired and this new adaptation—and posed with the new Cady Heron, Angourie Rice, on the pink carpet.

"It was an amazing movie to work on when I did it, and I can't wait to see this new iterative version of it. I think it's gonna be wonderful," Lohan told The Associated Press.

Lohan said it "felt great" to hear of the movie's impact on teens over the years and was excited that the new film, which releases Friday, will deal with new topics.

"I loved Lindsay's performance in the 2004 film so much, it's one of my favorites," Rice said. "So in everything I did, I just hoped that my performance would be adding to the legacy that she started."

Just like the 2004 version, the musical movie follows Cady's move to the suburbs, where she experiences the treacherous hierarchies of high school. There, she finds herself accepted by an elite yet shallow group of girls known as the Plastics, led by Regina George—here played by Reneé Rapp. It's billed as "a new twist from Tina Fey," incorporating songs and new technology, but Fey said the "core story" still resonates two decades later.

"In a way, things haven't changed that much, right? People have new ways to mess with each other, right? They can do it over the internet, but it's still just human beings pulling someone else down to make themselves momentarily feel better, right?" she told the AP.

Lohan concurred, saying the movie is a good "wake-up call."

Yiyun Li's 'Wednesday's Child' among finalists for $20,000 Story Prize

NEW YORK (AP) — Short fiction by Yiyun Li, Bennett Sims and Paul Yoon are finalists for the 20th annual Story Prize, given for the year's outstanding short story collection.

Prize officials announced Tuesday that the nominees are Li's "Wednesday's Child," Sims' "Other Minds and Other Stories" and Yoon's "The Hive and the Honey." The Story Prize was founded in 2004 by editor Larry Dark and philanthropist Julie Lindsey, who pick the finalists. Three outside judges then choose the winners. The top prize is $20,000 and the runners-up get $5,000 each.

"Even after reading more than 20,000 short story collections over the twenty years this award has existed, we're still encountering short story collections unlike any we've read before. These three books expand the form and offer profound observations about the human condition," Dark said in a statement.

The winner will be announced March 26. Previous recipients include Anthony Doerr, George Saunders and Edwidge Danticat.

Woman took in parents but now wants them out

DEAR ABBY: I'm a single parent raising five young kids alone. I own my home, have a good job and have done well financially. Five years ago, after several years of making bad financial decisions, my parents showed up on my doorstep. Their house had been foreclosed on. I had given much advice leading up to it. I have also offered them advice since then to help get them on their feet. Little of it has been taken.

Living with them has triggered issues from my childhood, most of which they contributed to but take no responsibility for. They do pay a little to me in rent, help with housework and sometimes watch my children. But past issues are still evident, and I don't want that example around my kids.

I have made clear for months that they have overstayed their welcome, but they argue with me and take no steps to get on their feet. I have tried having meetings with them and my siblings. These end in shouting matches, and nothing changes. I know if I evict them, it will likely sever the relationship. Is that my only option?

DISGRUNTLED DAUGHTER

DEAR DAUGHTER: You were kind to take your parents in, but you are being taken advantage of. This is a problem you should discuss with an attorney, because after having camped out in your home for the length of time your parents have, it may indeed take a formal eviction to get them out.

Do not expect to be thanked for the help you have given them all this time and, if I read your letter correctly, do not expect any assistance from your siblings. Do what you must for yourself and your children. You have given your parents enough.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: This morning, I found my husband has been chatting on his phone with a much younger woman. Since then, I have been wondering if I should ask him about it. He just retired, but I'm still working, and my job is in the afternoon and evening. He's an extrovert who loves being around people. Should I be worried he's cheating on me?

We've been married 30 years and have a grown child together. Our sex life isn't good. For many years, we worked opposite shifts, so we didn't go to bed and get up at the same time. Now we do, but he's alone during the afternoon and evening. I don't have any friends I trust enough to ask, and I'm certainly not saying anything to family. Can you help?

SUSPICIOUS IN NEW MEXICO

DEAR SUSPICIOUS: Because you know her age, I'm guessing you already know quite a bit about this much younger woman. If you ask your husband about this, you will have to disclose that you looked at his phone. Spouses don't usually do that unless they are suspicious something might be going on.

If you think what he's been doing could be a threat to your marriage, you are going to have to come clean and tell him you feel threatened by what you saw. Better to confront than to ignore and hope a problem will go away by itself.

■ ■ ■

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

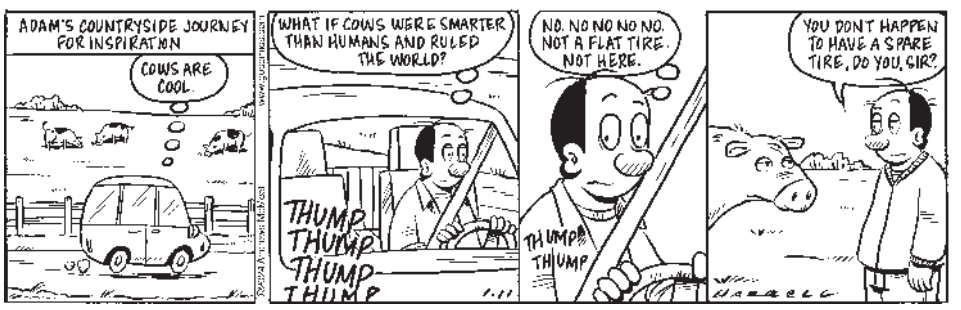
YES!
POW
WASN'T THAT A GREAT SHOT?? WHAT CONTROL! WHAT FORM! DID YOU NOTICE THE TOP SPIN? DID YOU NOTICE HOW I PACKED THE SNOW SO THAT...
A REAL FRIEND WOULDVE BEEN HAPPY FOR ME!
1-11

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

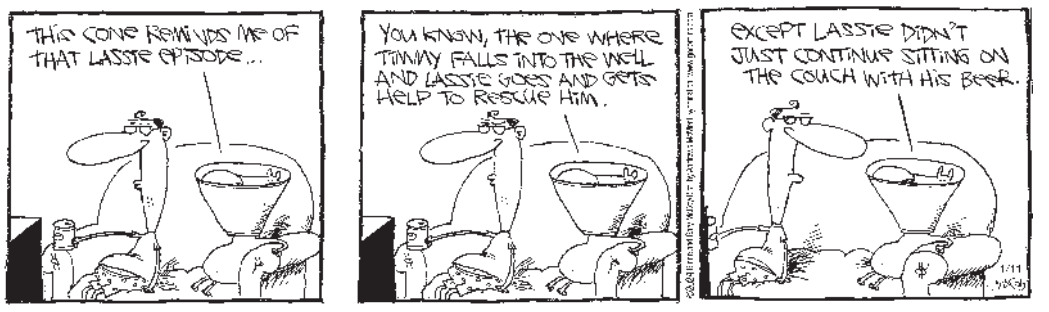
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


ADAM'S COUNTRYSIDE JOURNEY FOR INSPIRATION
COWS ARE COOL.
WHAT IF COWS WERE SMARTER THAN HUMANS AND RULED THE WORLD?
THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP
1-11
NO. NO NO NO NO. NOT A FLAT TIRE. NOT HERE.
THUMP THUMP
YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO HAVE A SPARE TIRE, DO YOU, SIR?

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


THIS ONE REMINDS ME OF THAT LASSIE EPISODE...
YOU KNOW, THE ONE WHERE TIMMY FALLS INTO THE WELL AND LASSIE GOES AND GETS HELP TO RESCUE HIM.
EXCEPT LASSIE DIDN'T JUST CONTINUE SITTING ON THE COUCH WITH HIS BEER.
1/11

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Russian news agency
5 Drench
8 Like one leg of a triathlon
12 Mideast gulf
13 401(k) alternative
14 Hawaiian city
15 Poi base
16 Erie Canal mule
17 Novelist Rice
18 Sneak attack
20 Caution
22 Up to
23 Aviv preceder
24 Symbols of intrigue
27 Waiting periods
32 Pie — mode
33 — Paulo
34 "Mayday!"
35 Issued, as an order
38 Sports figure?
39 Family
40 He gives a hoot
42 Deodorant type
45 Foliage
49 Wicked
50 "Entourage" role
52 "Livin' La — Loca"
53 Sitcom pioneer Arnaz
54 PX patrons
55 Currier's partner
56 Scraps
57 Used a chair
58 Axes

DOWN

1 "Toodle-oo!"
2 Eve's mate
3 Belgrade resident
4 Ant-eaters' features
5 Reminder to Santa
6 Epoch
7 Bath powder
8 Little lad
9 Menu with reds and whites
10 Arm bone
11 Champagne brand
19 Yes, to Juan
21 Chowed down
24 Bankroll
25 Quarterback Manning
26 Publisher's catalog
28 Dundee denial
29 Planning aid
30 Extinct bird
31 Concorde, e.g.
36 Country singer Mel
37 Year, in San Juan
38 Czech, e.g.
41 You and I
42 Decorate anew
43 Done with
44 Kvetches
46 "— Las Vegas"
47 Paradise
48 Lip
51 Estuary

Solution time: 24 mins.

B	R	I	M		B	L	E		U	N	I	S
L	O	U	E		A	L	E		I	I	D	Y
U	S	E	R	N	A	M	E		I	C	O	N
F	S	S	F	S			P	I	C	K	I	F
			L	A	B	S		D	A	N		
I	U	C	Y		A	P	S	F		A	M	Y
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		E	N	E		E	T	N	A			
S	F	N	F	G	A			A	N	W	A	R
S	I	A	V		F	I	I	F	N	A	M	F
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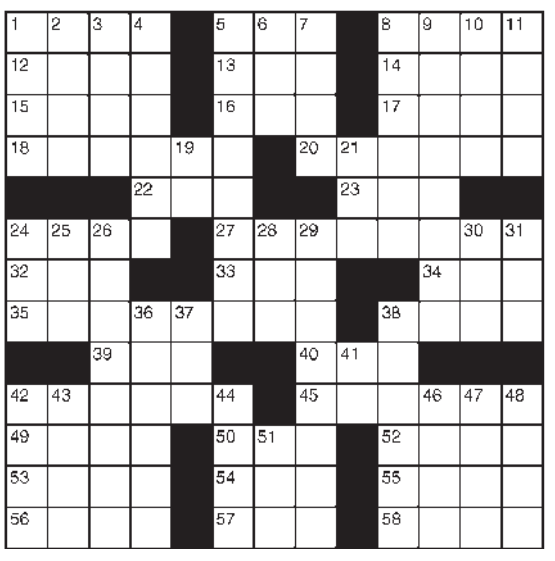
S	F	F	R		R	O	D		H	O	S	S

Yesterday's answer 1-11



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Aja Naomi King, 39; Amanda Peet, 52; Mary J. Blige, 53; Kim Coles, 62.

Happy Birthday: Spice things up. Make grand gestures that impact you and those close to you. Open the door that leads to possibilities and positive change. Put your energy into making your dreams a reality. Be the one to negotiate and navigate your way to victory. You have plenty to gain if you are willing to take the time, do your due diligence and seize the moment when opportunity strikes. Your numbers are 5, 13, 24, 27, 33, 39, 44.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Keep your records and documents in order. Don't expect things to run smoothly, and be ready to counter any negativity that comes your way. Use intelligence and practicality to ward off being compromised by someone trying to blame you. Protect your interests. ✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Put your money, personal papers and possessions in a safe place. Be a good listener and a helpful associate, but don't take the blame for someone else's shortcomings. Focus on what you can learn and accomplish without putting your reputation or position in jeopardy. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Take a long, hard look at the past, present and future. Gauge relationships strategically. Refuse to let emotions taint your perspective. Look at the fine print to verify plans, promises and the accuracy of information necessary for your success. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Seeing is believing. Show what you have to offer, and you'll receive interest and suggestions to help you achieve your goal. Let your imagination guide you, and you'll figure out how to fine-tune your plan. A partnership and profits are within reach. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Work the room. Make connections, but don't offer pretenses. Stick to the truth, and you'll avoid wasting time on damage control. Listen to and compliment others more often. You'll build trust and friendships that will help you receive the guidance you need. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Be open to suggestions, but verify information before incorporating it into your plans. An opportunity to learn something new or to make connections through travel or networking will pay off. Search for unique ways to use your skills. ✪✪✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Don't count on anyone or anything. Make your way forward using experience and skills. Lean toward simple decisions that enhance what you are trying to do and keep you within budget. A financial adjustment at home will ease stress. ✪✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Follow through with your plans regardless of what others do or say. Avoid joint ventures or giving up your goals for someone else's dream. Pay attention to what's happening around you. Learn from your mistakes and focus on what's possible. ✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Listen, dissect what you hear and walk away from situations that are dubious or contradictory to what you are trying to achieve. A practical approach will guard against financial loss and help you maintain your reputation. ✪✪✪

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

					8		1	9
					7	6		
			6					7
3	1			6			9	
4		2		8	5		6	
			7			5		
6	9		8					3
7		3				9		
		8		4	9			6

Difficulty: ★★★ 1/11

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

2	7	6	8	4	3	5	9	1
1	9	5	2	6	7	8	4	3
8	3	4	5	1	9	6	2	7
6	2	1	3	5	4	7	8	9
7	5	8	1	9	2	3	6	4
9	4	3	7	8	6	2	1	5
5	1	9	6	3	8	4	7	2
3	6	7	4	2	1	9	5	8
4	8	2	9	7	5	1	3	6

Difficulty: ★★★ 1/10

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EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Take time to rearrange your space to ensure maximum efficiency. Be creative but not extravagant, and make every move count. Set an example for others and offer support, encouragement and a smile. Do your part and make the world a better place. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Keep your eye on subscriptions, updates and institutional dealings that require attention. Don't leave someone else in charge when money or reputation are at stake. Talk to experts who will point you in the right direction. Don't take a risk with your position or health. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Contracts, financial ventures and how you earn and use your money will lead to a stable future. Your insight and willingness to handle matters yourself will prove valuable. An opportunity to invest more time in yourself will pay off. Don't let anyone disrupt your plans. ✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are ambitious, resourceful and uncommon. You are curious and enthusiastic.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

RICHARD ROUNDTREE (1942-2023) **Solution: 9 letters**

V	S	R	E	S	U	O	H	E	R	I	F	I	L	M
E	Y	T	A	E	H	N	I	C	O	(L)	E	E	H	N
I	J	S	A	T	T	A	Y	L	(E)	R	M	O	R	O
L	F	A	S	G	S	G	F	(A)	R	A	M	E	D	I
D	E	E	M	A	E	R	(D)	T	F	E	S	R	R	T
I	U	E	K	E	B	O	O	R	L	O	E	E	A	A
A	N	K	T	A	S	M	I	L	L	E	K	E	W	T
M	S	C	E	S	T	C	E	C	E	J	A	R	A	I
O	E	K	H	T	A	H	A	R	O	Y	R	A	M	O
N	Q	R	C	O	C	I	R	H	O	D	E	C	L	L
D	U	O	O	O	N	P	N	Y	I	C	N	E	E	P
S	E	Y	R	R	J	S	O	N	N	J	S	R	H	X
M	L	W	M	O	D	E	L	O	V	E	U	G	T	A
I	E	E	S	P	E	E	D	B	R	I	C	K	I	L
N	S	N	O	I	T	A	R	E	N	E	G	S	A	B

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Africa, Akuji, Arnold, Award, Big Score, Blaxploitation, Brick, Career, Chips, Closer, Diamonds, Duke, Ebony, Embassy, Fame, Film, Firehouse, Generations, Heat, Home, Inchon, James, Jocks, John, Karen, Kathryn, Kelli, Lead, Love, Mary, Model, Morgan, New Rochelle, New York, Nicole, Racer, Role, Roots, Sequel, Shaft, Speed, Stage, Star, Steel, Tayler, Thelma, Veil

Yesterday's Answer: Cali Mill Plaza

The NEW **Treasury 57** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Sabonis' 37 points leads Kings to wild victory over Pistons

AP

Detroit Pistons center Jalen Duren (0) is defedned by Sacramento Kings forward Domantas Sabonis (10) during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024, in Detroit.

DETROIT (AP)—Domantas Sabonis scored 37 points, and had 13 assists and 10 rebounds, to help the Sacramento Kings to a roller-coaster 131-110 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Tuesday.

The Kings trailed by 20 points in the first quarter, led by 15 in the third, let the Pistons tie the game in the fourth and then pulled away down the stretch. Keegan Murray added 32 points and De'Aaron Fox scored 26.

"I thought our defense was great after the first quarter—we gave up 47 points in the first and only 45 in the entire second half," Kings coach Mike Brown said. "Offensively, I think we were really good as well. We had 39 assists on 54 buckets. That's big time."

Detroit (3-34) has lost five straight since breaking its NBA-record 28-game losing streak. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 26 and Jaden Ivey added 22.

"We had too many turnovers and there were too many times where we struggled to get into our offense," Pistons coach Monty Williams said. "When we start having some success, teams are going to hit us in the mouth and get physical with us. We have to be able to overcome that."

The Pistons played without Cade Cunningham, who will be out at least 7-10 days with a knee sprain, but he was active on the sidelines.

"Cade was talking to us—telling us to keep going and keep our energy," Ivey said. "It just feels like they got a lot of easy transition points off our turnovers."

The Kings were coming off a 133-100 home loss to the New Orleans Pelicans on Sunday.

"I don't think there's anything we need to change," Murray said. "We played five bad quarters, but once we got out of that mindset, we did a good job. We just need to play four quarters at that level to be a really good team."

After Detroit tied the game at 101, Monk scored seven straight points to put the Kings up 110-101 with 7:44 to play.

Sacramento led by three points at the half, then started the third quarter with a 15-3 run to go ahead 83-68. Detroit, though, narrowed the gap to 98-95 on an Alec Burks 3-pointer at the end of the period.

Detroit hit 15 of its first 18 field-goal attempts, including 5 of 7 on 3-pointers, to take an early 32-17 lead. The Pistons finished the quarter with a season-high 47 points and an 18-point lead.

The Kings, though, hit 11 of their first 12 shots in the second quarter and led 68-65 at the half.

"I think we were just really aggressive," Murray said. "We had nine deflections in that quarter, and I think that was the turning point of the game."

LAKERS 132, RAPTORS 131

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Anthony Davis scored 20 of his 41 points in a brilliant fourth quarter, and the Lakers held off the Raptors to win back-to-back games for the first time in a month.

LeBron James had 22 points and 12 assists for the Lakers, who went 3-10 immediately after winning the inaugural NBA In-Season Tournament in December. The Lakers held off the Clippers on Sunday before outlasting the Raptors to get back to .500 (19-19).

Davis grabbed 11 rebounds, went 13 for 17 from the field and 13 of 14 on free throws while carrying the Lakers down the stretch against the Raptors, who were missing injured starting center Jakob Poeltl. Davis completed his masterful performance by scoring 10 points in the final 1:01, including eight free throws without a miss, and making a key block on Scottie Barnes.

Barnes scored 26 points and Pascal Siakam had 25 for the Raptors

KNICKS 112, TRAIL BLAZERS 84

NEW YORK (AP)—OG Anunoby scored 23 points, his most since coming to New York, and the Knicks won their fifth in a row since he joined their lineup with a victory over the Trail Blazers.

Anunoby scored 16 in a first quarter, when the Knicks opened a 19-point lead that would grow to 39 in the third quarter. The forward went 6 for 7 in the period, 4 of 5 behind the 3-point arc, and was already just a point shy of the 17 he scored in his Knicks debut against Minnesota on New Year's Day, his previous best since coming from Toronto in a Dec. 30 trade.

He might have approached his season high of 29, also at Madison Square Garden while playing for the Raptors last month, but the starters didn't need to play much in the second half.

Jerami Grant scored 21 points for the Trail Blazers, who lost for the fourth time in five games.

TIMBERWOLVES 113, MAGIC 92

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Karl-Anthony Towns scored 23 of his 28 points in the first half and the Timberwolves led from start to finish in a win over the Magic.

Rudy Gobert had 21 points and 12 rebounds and the Western Conference-leading Timberwolves (26-10) won easily despite getting only six points and three assists from leading scorer Anthony Edwards.

Moritz Wagner led the Magic (21-16) with 21 points and seven rebounds. Jalen Suggs had 20 points and five rebounds and Paolo Banchero had 18 points on 8 for 22 shooting.

GRIZZLIES 120, MAVERICKS 103

DALLAS (AP)—Desmond Bane scored 32 points to lead the injury-riddled Grizzlies to a win over the Mavericks.

Bane scored 13 of the Grizzlies' final 18 points in the third quarter to help build a 20-point lead entering the final quarter in the team's first game since learning of leading scorer Ja Morant's season-ending shoulder injury.

The Grizzlies (14-23), who are 2-0 since Morant's injury, were without Marcus Smart for much of the second half. Smart left the game with 7:38 left in the third quarter with a dislocated finger on his right hand.

Before his injury, Smart scored 23 points on 9 of 16 shooting. He hit four 3-pointers, including one from the left wing to give Memphis an 18-point lead before leaving the game. He later returned to the bench with an icepack covering his right hand.

Kyrie Irving scored 33 points and Luka Doncic added 31 despite being in and out of the game with an ankle injury.

NBA says refs made wrong call on late foul that gave Indiana tie-breaking free throws vs. Celtics

INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—The NBA office said Tuesday the referees in Monday night's Boston-Indiana game made the wrong call on a foul with 0.6 seconds to go, resulting in the decisive free throws that gave Indiana a 133-131 win.

In Tuesday's Last Two Minute Report, league officials said Celtics forward Kristaps Porzingis only made "incidental arm contact occurring concurrent with the block" on Bennedict Mathurin's final shot.

The referees correctly conducted a replay review to determine if the contact occurred before the buzzer sounded and whether time should be added to the clock, which it was. But the report said the play was not reviewable under the replay trigger and Boston was out of challenges.

Mathurin made the tie-breaking free throws to beat the Eastern Conference's top team and square the teams' season series at 2-2.

Spoelstra, Miami Heat have agreed on a contract extension

MIAMI (AP)—Erik Spoelstra and the Miami Heat have agreed on a contract extension, ensuring that the longest-tenured coach in franchise history only keeps adding to his team records for many years to come.

Spoelstra signed an eight-year extension worth around $120 million—the largest contract in NBA history in terms of total value for a coach—according to a person with knowledge of the agreement who spoke Tuesday to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the terms were not revealed publicly.

Spoelstra's current deal expires after this season.

Spoelstra is in his 16th season as head coach in Miami and his 29th season overall with the franchise. He started in the video room and eventually becoming a scout, an assistant coach and then Pat Riley's hand-picked successor as head coach in April 2008.

Spoelstra was 24 when he arrived in Miami. He's 53 now and has three NBA championship rings, two of them coming as Miami's head coach. He has taken the Heat to the NBA Finals six times, including last season.

Spoelstra is the league's second-longest-tenured current coach behind San Antonio's Gregg Popovich, who is in his 28th season as coach of the Spurs. Spoelstra's 725 regular-season wins rank 19th in NBA history and only three coaches—Popovich with the Spurs, Jerry Sloan with Utah and Red Auerbach with Boston—have won more games with one franchise than Spoelstra has with the Heat.

Spoelstra is also an assistant coach for USA Basketball in this Olympic cycle and will be part of head coach Steve Kerr's staff at the Paris Games this summer. Spoelstra will likely be among the top candidates to take over the Olympic team for the next cycle that will culminate at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

"We're about the sweat and the grind," Spoelstra said before this season began. "It's about when nobody's watching. We have a saying at the Heat: 'There's a beauty in the grind, there's a beauty in the sweat.' That's about what happens behind the scenes."

Among Spoelstra's highlights—a 27-game winning streak on the way to a 66-16 record in the 2012-13 season (the winning streak was the second-longest such run in NBA history), the 2012 and 2013 NBA titles with the teams led by LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh, and nine NBA coach of the month awards. During Spoelstra's tenure in Miami, no coach in the league has more postseason victories; he has 109, 10 more than Kerr has had with Golden State.

The Heat put a premium on stability, and few franchises in sports have enjoyed as much on that front as Miami has. There have only been six coaches in the franchise's 36 years; Ron Rothstein was the original coach for three years, followed by Kevin Loughery for parts of four years until Alvin Gentry took over on an interim basis to finish the 1994-95 season.

That's when Riley came to Miami from New York. He coached until 2003, then promoted Stan Van Gundy from the assistant role to the head coach spot. Van Gundy resigned 21 games into his third season, Riley returned to the bench to lead the Heat to their first NBA title in 2006, and then Riley stepped aside again after the 2007-08 campaign to give Spoelstra the job.

There hasn't been another change since. Spoelstra passed Riley (454) as the franchise's win leader in December 2017 and now has nearly as many wins as the other five Heat coaches combined.

"We've had incredible stability and consistency over the years," Spoelstra said this past fall, when asked about how he's remained with the Heat for so long. "I've been very fortunate to work for who I work for."

Titans fire coach Vrabel after back-to-back losing seasons

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—Tennessee Titans controlling owner Amy Adams Strunk wants a fresh approach to compete in the NFL, so she fired coach Mike Vrabel on Tuesday morning after six seasons and losing 18 of the past 24 games.

Strunk said in a statement it was a decision "as difficult as any I've made."

But she said she believes teams best positioned to win must be aligned and collaborate across the board. The Titans started that shift a year ago, hiring Ran Carthon as the franchise's first Black general manager and expanding its analytics staff. More changes were needed to "fully achieve our vision."

Strunk said she assessed the team throughout the season in an interview released by the team. The Titans went 7-10 in 2022 and just finished a 6-11 season Sunday.

"I thought it was time to make that change," Strunk said.

The announcement came a day after the Titans cleaned out their lockers with Vrabel not speaking to reporters. It was the first time in the franchise's 27 seasons in Tennessee the head coach did not talk to reporters since the team moved to the state from Texas.

Several Titans, from rookie quarterback Will Levis to two-time Pro Bowl defensive lineman Jeffery Simmons, all said they wanted to keep Vrabel as their coach.

The Titans hired Carthon from San Francisco where he spent six seasons. The Niners have made the playoffs three straight seasons and four of five, including reaching Super Bowl 54, and currently are the NFC's No. 1 seed.

Carthon said at a news conference Tuesday he has a couple of candidates already for his first head coaching search. The search process starts immediately.

"We have to get it right, and I'm confident that we will," Carthon said.

AP

Tennessee Titans controlling owner Amy Adams Strunk talks with head coach Mike Vrabel before an NFL football game against the Jacksonville Jaguars, Sunday, Nov. 19, 2023, in Jacksonville, Fla. S

Carthon dispelled speculation of friction between himself and Vrabel, saying the coach was part of every meeting on players. Carthon also said Vrabel never talked with him about wanting more control over personnel.

"We're not going to bring players in here that the coaches don't want to coach," Carthon said.

The Titans now are the sixth NFL team at the moment looking for a new coach, joining Atlanta and Washington who fired coaches Monday. The Raiders, the Chargers and Panthers didn't wait for the season to end before firing coaches.

NFL teams can't start in-person interviews until after the divisional round after owners voted in October to push those back a week to slow down the hiring process and try to increase diversity in hiring.

They also cannot interview head coaching candidates employed by other NFL teams until Tuesday or Wednesday for any coach whose team is done or team has a playoff bye. Teams can start virtual interviews.

Any internal candidates or someone not currently employed by the NFL can interview in person.

Strunk said the Titans thought of trying to trade Vrabel as a coach expected to be a top candidate. She noted a coach has to be willing to be traded, and trying to deal Vrabel might've delayed the Titans' search by three weeks.

"To get the right head coach, I was just not willing to go to the back of the line and take a chance of missing out on someone we really wanted," Strunk said.

Hired in January 2018, Vrabel went 56-48 overall, including a 2-3 record in the playoffs that included reaching the AFC championship game in the 2019 season as part of three straight playoff berths.

The Titans contended for a playoff spot in the season finale of his first five seasons until they were eliminated from postseason contention for this season in December. Vrabel wound up coaching a team that used the most players in the NFL in each of the past three seasons because of injuries.

Carthon said nine starters missed the season finale and that figuring out how to stay healthier will be a part of the process as the Titans hire a new coach.

Vrabel signed a contract extension after a 2021 season where he won the AP NFL Coach of the Year award. He said last week that "of course he wants to be here" in 2024, but used an expletive to make clear that losing stinks.

Strunk fired general manager Jon Robinson on Dec. 6, 2022, in the midst of the team's seven-game slide to blow a third straight division title. She hired Carthon in January 2023, though he had few resources to fix the roster.

The Titans go into this offseason with the seventh overall draft pick, the second-most salary cap space in the NFL and believe they have their quarterback after Levis went 3-6 as a rookie. The 33rd pick overall out of Kentucky took over at the end of October after veteran Ryan Tannehill sprained his right ankle.

Strunk said she will never shy away from having "unapologetically high expectations" for the team her late father founded in 1960. She called this offseason as important as any in the franchise's history. This will be the third head coach Strunk has hired since taking over in March 2015.

"I'm prepared to make the hard decisions to hopefully get us there sooner," Strunk said.

Tennessee breaks ground on a new enclosed stadium expected to cost $2.1 billion sometime this spring, which is set to open for the 2027 season. That only adds to the pressure of making the right decisions from top to bottom moving forward.

Jim Harbaugh faces decision on whether to stay or go back to NFL

HOUSTON (AP)—Michigan's climb back to the summit of college football ended with its 34-13 win over Washington in the College Football Playoff championship game on Monday night.

Next, the Wolverines and their fans wait and see if Jim Harbaugh stays or goes.

Harbaugh, as he did during the lead-up to the championship, deflected all questions about his future an hour after the game and again Tuesday. But decision time is drawing near as NFL franchises begin or consider searching for new coaches.

"I just want to enjoy this. I hope you give me that. Can a guy have that?" Harbaugh said after the game. "Does it always have to be, 'What's next, what's the future?'"

Harbaugh looked into NFL jobs the last two years before deciding to stay at Michigan. It's possible he won't this time, especially with the school facing possible NCAA sanctions for recruiting violations and the sign-stealing scandal that hung over the team all season.

There is also the question of what's left to accomplish at Michigan for the 60-year-old Harbaugh. The "Michigan Man" did what he set out to do when he left the San Francisco 49ers in 2014 to return to Ann Arbor, where his father was an assistant under Bo Schembechler and where he was a star quarterback in the mid-1980s.

Running back Blake Corum pointed out Harbaugh has been a winner at each of his coaching stops.

"So who wouldn't want him?" Corum said. "When things come up like that, hey, you've got to do what's best for you. You have a great coach like that, everybody wants a piece of you."

Harbaugh took over a proud program humbled under Rich Rodriguez and Brady Hoke and has gone 89-25 over nine years, six with at least 10 wins. His only losing record came during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

The last three years mark one of the most dominant periods in the history of the only program to win more than 1,000 games. The Wolverines have gone 40-3, won three straight Big Ten championships, made three consecutive playoff appearances and now are national champions. Harbaugh's father, Jack, and NFL coach brother John watched his moment of triumph inside NRG Stadium.

Harbaugh did divulge one of his future plans after the game. He said he would make good on his promise to get a tattoo saying "15-0" if the Wolverines had a perfect season.

"I'm going to put it on my shoulder—I don't know if it's my left or right yet," he said. "I'm a right-handed quarterback. I'll probably get it on my right. And then an 'M' that's a maize and blue 'M.' Also that signifies a thousand in Roman numerals. Can't tell you what that means to us, too, that we reached 1,000 wins this year."

The Wolverines' 28 wins over the last two years are the most over back-to-back seasons in program history.

Michigan has said it wants to retain Harbaugh, but the coach put off contract talks, perhaps a sign he wants to entertain NFL offers.

As great a season as it was, the road to 15-0 was bumpy. Harbaugh served a school-imposed, three-game suspension to start the season for the alleged recruiting violations during the pandemic. He also was suspended for the last three regular-season games for violating the Big Ten sportsmanship policy in connection to the sign-stealing scheme blamed on a staffer who resigned during the season.

Harbaugh said the championship victory was glorious.

"We stood strong and tall because we knew we were innocent," Harbaugh said. "It went exactly how we wanted it to go. It went exactly how we wanted it to go."

Michigan fourth-year defensive end Braiden McGregor said Harbaugh is always helpful and happy for players who decide to pursue an NFL career.

"So I think that's the same way we should feel about him," McGregor said before the game. "If that is his decision at the end of the day or he does get a job, happy for him, hopefully he can go win a Super Bowl. But if he comes back, happy that he comes back, let's try to win another natty."

Yuki Matsui looks forward to key relief role with Padres

As well as being teammates with Darvish

SAN DIEGO (AP)—New San Diego Padres reliever Yuki Matsui says he's not expecting to come in and become the closer right away but is looking forward to pitching in big late-inning situations.

The 28-year-old left-hander is one of two new Padres relievers who will compete to replace All-Star closer Josh Hader, who became a free agent after last season, when San Diego flopped and missed the playoffs. Matsui, who signed on Dec. 23, can earn $33.6 million over five seasons if he becomes the team's closer. He could opt out of the deal after three years and $14.5 million if his pitching elbow remains healthy.

The cost-cutting Padres also signed South Korean reliever Woo-Suk Go to a $4.5 million, two-year contract that includes a 2026 mutual option plus bonus and escalator provisions that could make the deal worth $9.4 million over three seasons if he closes regularly.

AP

Japan relief pitcher Yuki Matsui throws during the eighth inning of the first round Pool B game between South Korea and Japan at the World Baseball Classic at Tokyo Dome in Tokyo on March 10, 2023.

General manager A.J. Preller said last week the Padres will sort out roles during spring training. It's likely Robert Suarez would begin the season as closer.

"The fact of the matter is, I haven't pitched a single pitch in the big leagues yet. Maybe it's not realistic to say that I'll be pitching in the ninth inning as we start the season," Matsui said through an interpreter during a videoconference with reporters on Tuesday. "But I'd like to just go in there when given the opportunity, get outs and sort of build a trust from the team and from my teammates. Hopefully, I'm in one of those high-leverage situations to pitch in games."

The 5-foot-8 Matsui was a five-time All-Star in Japan for the Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles, leading the Pacific League in saves in 2019, 2022 and 2023. He had a career-best 39 saves with a 1.57 ERA and 2-3 record last season, striking out 72 and walking 13 in 57 1/3 innings.

He has a 2.40 career ERA, 236 saves and a 1.11 WHIP. He is the youngest pitcher in the Japanese major leagues to reach 200 saves.

Matsui said a big part of his decision to sign with San Diego was that countryman Yu Darvish is the Padres' ace.

"I had an opportunity to be teammates with him during the WBC last year and obviously, needless to say how good of a player he is, but my take on him is that he's a great person, too; very respectable, both in baseball and as a human being," Matsui said. "So just to get the chance to be close to him every day at the field and spend time with him, I thought that's something very beautiful."

The Padres had a $258 million payroll on opening day last year, the third-highest in the majors, but were a major disappointment. Following the death of owner Peter Seidler in November, the team is expected to pare payroll to less than $200 million in order to get under the luxury tax threshold.

As part of their cost-cutting, the Padres traded All-Star slugger Juan Soto and center fielder Trent Grisham to the New York Yankees last month for five players. Soto has one season of team control left and is likely to get a salary around $32 million.

Ohtani's deal prompts California controller to ask Congress to cap deferred payments

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—California Controller Malia M. Cohen wants Congress to change the tax code to cap deferred payments, a change that could ensure the state is owed more money from Shohei Ohtani.

Cohen made the request four weeks after the two-way star and the Los Angeles Dodgers agreed to a record $700 million, 10-year contract that contains $680 million in deferred payments due from 2034-43. If Ohtani is not living in California at the time he receives the deferred money, he potentially could avoid what currently is the state's 13.3% income tax and 1.1% payroll tax for State Disability Insurance.

"The current tax system allows for unlimited deferrals for those fortunate enough to be in the highest tax brackets, creating a significant imbalance in the tax structure," Cohen said in a statement Monday. "The absence of reasonable caps on deferral for the wealthiest individuals exacerbates income inequality and hinders the fair distribution of taxes. I would urge Congress to take immediate and decisive action to rectify this imbalance."

Cohen's statement was first reported by the Los Angeles Times.

Ohtani's deal has the potential to save $98 million in state tax, according to the California Center for Jobs and the Economy, a public benefit corporation that aims to provide information on job creation and economic trends.

Cohen became controller last year. She was president of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors in 2018 and '19.

"Introducing limits on deductions and exemptions for high-income earners promotes social responsibility and contributes to a tax system that is just and beneficial for all," she said. "This action would not only create a more equitable tax system, but also generate additional revenue that can be directed towards addressing pressing important social issues and fostering economic stability."

AP

Los Angeles Dodgers' Shohei Ohtani answers questions during a baseball news conference at Dodger Stadium Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023, in Los Angeles.

NMIBF

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in Australia and at the FIBA Congress held in Manila.

The year 2023 saw the continuation of basketball programs such as the Junior and Senior National Program, the Summer Bola Camp, and Her World Her Rules.

Currently, NMIBF is hosting 3x3 tourneys as a chance for CNMI athletes to represent in the 3x3 FIBA Cup in Singapore next year.

With all those accomplishments, NMIBF president James Lee rated 2023 an 8.5 on a scale of 1-10 as they've "accomplished a lot as far as basketball goes." Therefore, the highlight of 2023, he said, "would be everything we were able to accomplish that year. All had its own significant accomplishment that benefited our athletes, coaches and most especially our island and community."

The 2023 NMIBF schedule came out last August and their leagues will continue this year. Lee said, "plans for 2024 is to continue with our existing programs and expand as well such as the grassroot/youth program and women's program which will be dubbed as "I Am Her" Program."

Lee then, on behalf of NMIBF, "Want to extend our gratitude and many thanks to all the sponsors such as IT&E, Marpac Inc, Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Tan Holdings, Marianas Arsenal, and R&J; our partners, FIBA, Northern Marianas Sports Association, Public School System; our athletes, media, volunteers and officials. Thank you, because without you all, the NMI Basketball Federation would not have been where we are today nor been able to accomplish any of the above mentioned."

MHS

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just keeping the goals coming and had a huge lead before time ran out.

Bergancia, Shimizu, and Lizama went on to score three more goals to wrap up the game at 9-3.

The Geckos' game against Saipan Southern High School Manta Rays on the other hand, ended in a thriller penalty shootout, 5-4.

Regulation ended, 1-1, scored by SSHS' Mark Patubo and SIS' Ian Song, respectively, and both teams went to work in extra time.

Both teams took turns scoring, but the Geckos' Andrew Chung grabbed the last goal and clinched the semis spot for SIS.

This afternoon, the Dolphins and Geckos are set to face off at 5:30pm after the third-place match between the Manta Rays and the Knights.

HMS

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secutive hits from RBI base hits. At this time, the Lancherus tried to make a comeback in the fourth inning but scored only two runs for a 6-8 DMS lead.

DMS then went ham and scored six more runs by the sixth inning. COVMS could not catch up as they scored just one more from Aiden Reyes.

In other results that day, Tanapag Middle School edged Francisco M. Sablan Middle School, 9-4, and Mount Carmel School defeated FMS, 13-6.

In the standings behind HMS and DMS are TMS and MCS who are deadlocked at 4-2; FMS is at 2-4; while HMS JV is 1-5, and COVMS are winless with six losses. Starting this afternoon, the teams will take the Capital Hill Softball Field at the start of the championship tourney.

The finals is set for Saturday, Jan. 13, also at the Capital Hill Softball Field.

Sabonis' 37 points leads Kings to wild victory over Pistons.

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Yuki Matsui looks forward to key relief role with Padres.

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MHS, SIS to contend for boys soccer title

NMIFA

Marianas High School's Cody Shimizu, with the ball, led the team with a hat-trick to win against Mount Carmel School in the NMIFA-PSS Interscholastic Boys High School Soccer League 2023-2024 semis last Tuesday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Marianas High School Dolphins and Saipan International School Geckos are contending for the NMIFA-PSS Interscholastic Boys High School Soccer League 2023-2024 championship after defeating their foes in the semis last Tuesday at the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville.

The Dolphins, in a run to defend their title, came barging onto the pitch with lightning agility and quickly buried the Mount Carmel School Knights, 9-3.

MHS' Cody Shimizu got a foothold of the ball and didn't let go until he scored in the fourth minute, but the Knights' Markus Toves evened it up right after.

After the Knights' goal, they went on to be silenced by the Dolphins as Shimizu, Andrew Sablan, Paul Lizama, and Anthony Bergancia scored a goal each in the first half for a 5-1 lead.

The Knights made for a rally in the second half but the adrenaline and pressure probably got to them as they scored in their own goal to put the Dolphins up, 6-1. They made up for it by scoring two goals by the 52nd minute, but the Dolphins were

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HMS, DMS are top teams in boys softball

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

With the last regular season games over, Hopwood Middle School Hilitais and Dandan Middle School Tottots are the top teams heading into the championship round of the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024.

The Hilitais and Tottots both sport a 5-1 record after their wins against their opponents last Monday at the Dandan Softball Field.

HMS varsity showed no mercy to their junior varsity team as they defeated them, 13-3.

It was a noisy first inning for the varsity team, while it was a quiet one for the JV as they scored eight consecutive runs before even registering an out. The inning went on much longer after they scored their runs with more base hits and free bases given by the JV's pitching staff.

LEIGH GASES

In this file photo, a Dandan Middle School fielder catches a pop up during one of their games in the Inaugural SBL-PSS Interscholastic Boys Middle School Slow Pitch Softball League 2023-2024 at the Dandan Softball Field.

The JV team's reply was just one run from their leadoff batter Joshua Lizama. With that one run, the varsity team had a commanding eight-run lead, and it made their pitcher Jesus William's job a much easier one.

In the end, the varsity team had 18 hits and no strikeouts, while the JV team had only three hits and racked up four K's.

DMS also discarded winless Chacha Ocean View Middle School Lancherus via a blowout, 14-7.

The Lancherus put up a better fight in their game as they scored four in the first inning from back-to-back-to-back runs by their first four batters. The Tottots were down by a run, 3-4 heading into the second inning, but flew into the lead after scoring five runs.

The Tottots' Jason Arriola, Jarell Herman, Leandro Castaneda, Rodney Tomei, and Hunter Dela Cruz scored con-

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NMIBF touts on 2023 accomplishments

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Basketball fans and players got more than they bargained for as ballers and fans alike stormed the newly built Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium to participate and watch multiple basketball tourneys.

Last year saw a full return of 5x5 basketball—from the interscholastic level to adult tournaments such as the "Mich" Ultra Cup Men's Islandwide Basketball League and the return of the Inter Gov't/Business League, as well as NMIBF's hosting of a goodwill tourney against Pohnpei, and welcoming FIBA Oceania National Federation & Sport Development manager Annie La Fleur.

Local athletes also participated in the Oceania's Coach Education Program in Melbourne, Australia, (Marlene Lumabi) and FIBA Youth Leadership Program in New Zealand (Jack Aranda).

The NMI was also represented at the FIBA Oceania Zone Assembly held

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LEIGH GASES

Participants of the CNMI Junior National girls program basketball clinic pose for a photo with FIBA Oceania National Federation and Sport Development manager Annie La Fleur, far left, last September at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.